I blew the whistle on workplace abuses at ZA/UM. In return, ZA/UM tried to defame me.

In February 2024, ZA/UM cancelled the standalone Disco Elysium expansion which was then known by its codename X7 and is now known as “Locust City”. At the same time, ZA/UM announced they would make nearly a third of their workforce redundant. I was on that list. As co-creator of Locust City alongside Argo Tuulik, I was approached by GLHF.gg for comment and issued a press statement about joining ZA/UM in 2022, which I likened to ***“being born into Yugoslavia in the ’90s: you’ve just missed the Party and now all you get is the bloodshed.”***

In Spring 2025, Chris Bratt from People Make Games informed me that they would be interested to do a new documentary on ZA/UM and what’s colloquially known as the new Disco Elysium “successors”, part of which would cover the tragic ruin of Locust City. I agreed to give Chris an interview and shared a large amount of evidence of the trail of broken relationships and agonizing workplace conditions behind the project. Our interview was filmed in April 2025 and took around four to five hours to film in its raw form, and we also had many pre- and follow-up calls to establish the course of events. I also detailed how the cancellation of the project and the imminent redundancy was preceded by a nearly 80-page formal Grievance complaint I had filed to the studio's HR, highlighting a range of systemic issues at the studio which of course, the studio and its Leads and Directors issued a blanket denial of.

When the documentary aired in August 2025—and you should really watch it on YouTube if you haven't already, Chris put an enormous amount of work and expense in the making—I was appalled but not surprised to find that ZA/UM had issued a number of false and unsubstantiated allegations against my character under guise of an anonymous corporate statement. I was never shown their statement or their allegations before they were broadcast, and I was not given a chance to respond and refute before the video was published. Therefore I am doing so now.

In short:

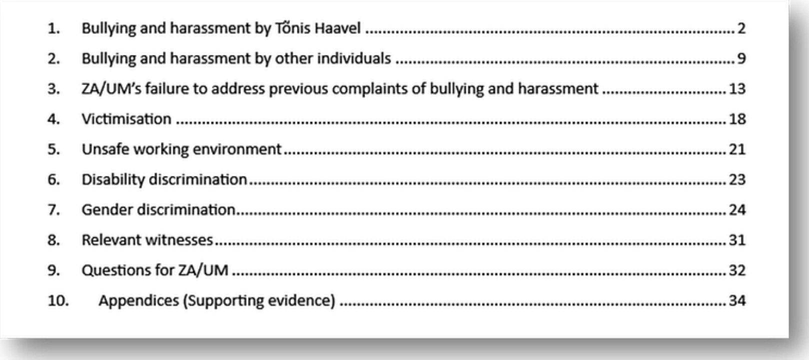
- **ZA/UM** made false allegations about things I never did in order to bring my character into question and distract from their shameful management failures,
- A mistake led to the publication of a statement that I had been placed under an "*external* HR investigation", which was never the case, but gave **ZA/UM**'s claims a false credibility,
- **ZA/UM** claimed they had found evidence against me in an internal HR investigation and leaked my supposed confidential HR documents to People Make Games, but no such investigation documents existed during my entire employment at **ZA/UM** nor were they provided to my trade union representative nor myself, which raises questions into the legitimacy of their claims, with the possibility of the investigation being either forged and backdated or dated after my departure and therefore unverified,
- and **ZA/UM** denied and covered up wrongdoing done by their leadership and management which I've previously raised and evidenced against them, attempting to further bring my credibility into question.

I truly hoped I wouldn't have to write any more about this issue, but unfortunately ZA/UM's management have left me no choice but to put an end to their unwarranted harassment and defamation of their former employees, which has now been going on for more than two years and has been reaching me through various sources.

ZA/UM is desperate to turn the story from one of corporate incompetence into one of petty office politics and interpersonal gossip, to turn the discussion away from the real corruption and violations of employment rights which consistently happen at ZA/UM, for which they conveniently do not want to answer:

- the **crunch** on X7 that caused people to cry in meetings,
- the **unprofessional redundancy procedure** in which people's dignities and employment rights were treated with disrespect,
- the issue of at least five known instances of women in senior professional positions (including Helen and myself) **frozen out of their roles** and driven out of the company under Tõnis' management, who were then reputationally smeared and had their qualifications outright denied;
- the **numerous HR complaints** filed for bullying against Tõnis and a number of other company leads and directors, which went nowhere and were serially mishandled and hushed up by the former HR lead who was then promoted to Management Advisor,
- the management doing nothing about employees reporting feeling **suicidal or burnt out** due to workplace conditions or becoming medically unfit to work, and in fact humiliating and blaming them,
- the inability of women to reach any positions of creative decision-making on the projects,
- the non-transparency, the **wage** and **role discrepancies**,
- the **double standards for promoting** hugely unqualified members of the inner "boys club",
- the absolutely rampant alcoholism and the culture of silencing, humiliation, bullying, retaliation, dishonesty, paranoia and fear

> which is perpetuated by the people who now sit in cushy positions, earning five figures *a month*, who were rewarded with privileged shares in a company created by other people’s work, blood and tears in exchange for disseminating vicious gossip and lies which were crucial to get people fired.

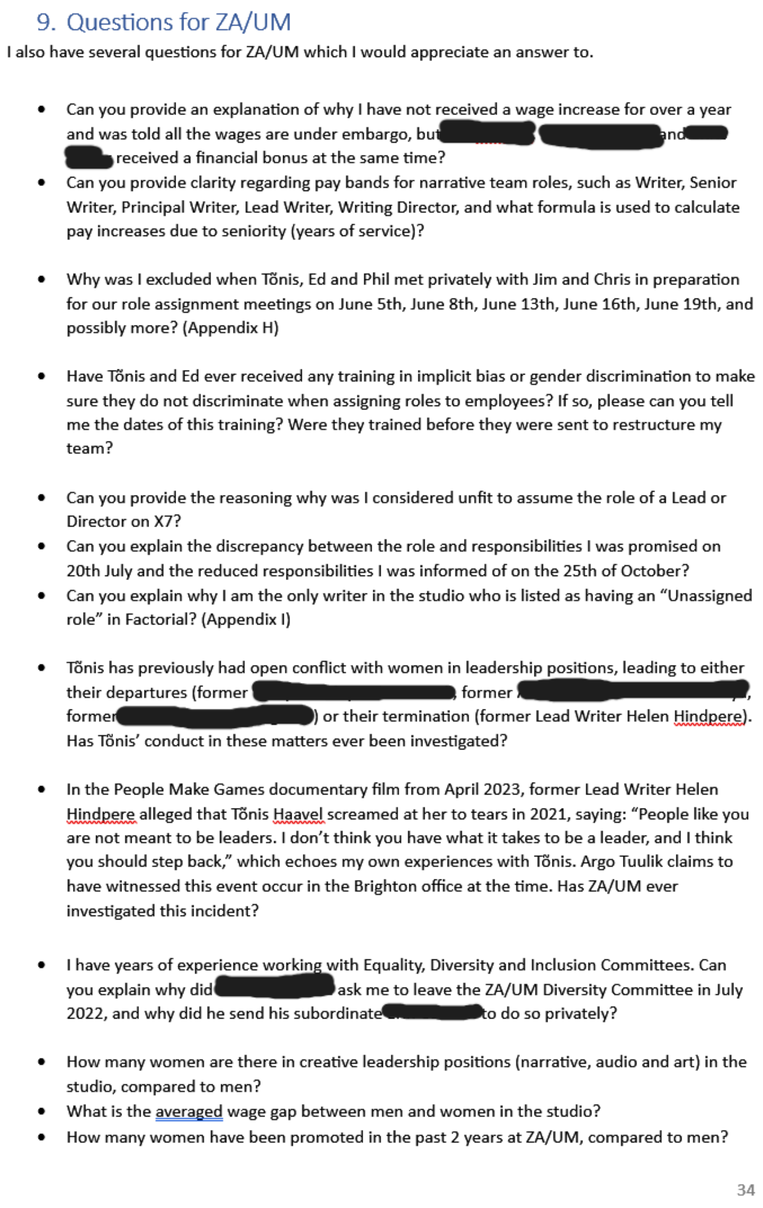


1. Bullying and harassment by Tõnis Haavel 2
2. Bullying and harassment by other individuals 9
3. ZA/UM’s failure to address previous complaints of bullying and harassment 13
4. Victimisation 18
5. Unsafe working environment 21
6. Disability discrimination 23
7. Gender discrimination 24
8. Relevant witnesses 31
9. Questions for ZA/UM 32
10. Appendices (Supporting evidence) 34

Table of Contents from my HR Grievance filed in December 2023

I am retaining most of this evidence in confidentiality except when critical, due to not wanting to expose the privacy of co-workers. I will only show a certain subset of evidence which I feel ZA/UM have left me absolutely no choice but to share due to their continuous defamation campaign in which they have tried to discredit me and bring my character into question in retaliation for me raising these workplace concerns, which leaves me no choice but to clear my name. I have also shown a larger collection of evidence to Chris Bratt at PMG.

Here is a the list of questions I had submitted to ZA/UM at the end of my Discrimination Grievance in December 2023, as is recommended by ACAS (the Employment Tribunal mediation body in the UK). ZA/UM refused to answer the questions.



9. Questions for ZA/UM

I also have several questions for ZA/UM which I would appreciate an answer to.

- Can you provide an explanation of why I have not received a wage increase for over a year and was told all the wages are under embargo, but [redacted] [redacted] and [redacted] received a financial bonus at the same time?
- Can you provide clarity regarding pay bands for narrative team roles, such as Writer, Senior Writer, Principal Writer, Lead Writer, Writing Director, and what formula is used to calculate pay increases due to seniority (years of service)?

- Why was I excluded when Tõnis, Ed and Phil met privately with Jim and Chris in preparation for our role assignment meetings on June 5th, June 8th, June 13th, June 16th, June 19th, and possibly more? (Appendix H)

- Have Tõnis and Ed ever received any training in implicit bias or gender discrimination to make sure they do not discriminate when assigning roles to employees? If so, please can you tell me the dates of this training? Were they trained before they were sent to restructure my team?

- Can you provide the reasoning why was I considered unfit to assume the role of a Lead or Director on X7?
- Can you explain the discrepancy between the role and responsibilities I was promised on 20th July and the reduced responsibilities I was informed of on the 25th of October?
- Can you explain why I am the only writer in the studio who is listed as having an "Unassigned role" in Factorial? (Appendix I)

- Tõnis has previously had open conflict with women in leadership positions, leading to either their departures (former [redacted], former [redacted], former [redacted]) or their termination (former Lead Writer Helen Hindpere). Has Tõnis' conduct in these matters ever been investigated?

- In the People Make Games documentary film from April 2023, former Lead Writer Helen Hindpere alleged that Tõnis Haavel screamed at her to tears in 2021, saying: "People like you are not meant to be leaders. I don't think you have what it takes to be a leader, and I think you should step back," which echoes my own experiences with Tõnis. Argo Tuulik claims to have witnessed this event occur in the Brighton office at the time. Has ZA/UM ever investigated this incident?

- I have years of experience working with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committees. Can you explain why did [redacted] ask me to leave the ZA/UM Diversity Committee in July 2022, and why did he send his subordinate [redacted] to do so privately?

- How many women are there in creative leadership positions (narrative, audio and art) in the studio, compared to men?
- What is the averaged wage gap between men and women in the studio?
- How many women have been promoted in the past 2 years at ZA/UM, compared to men?

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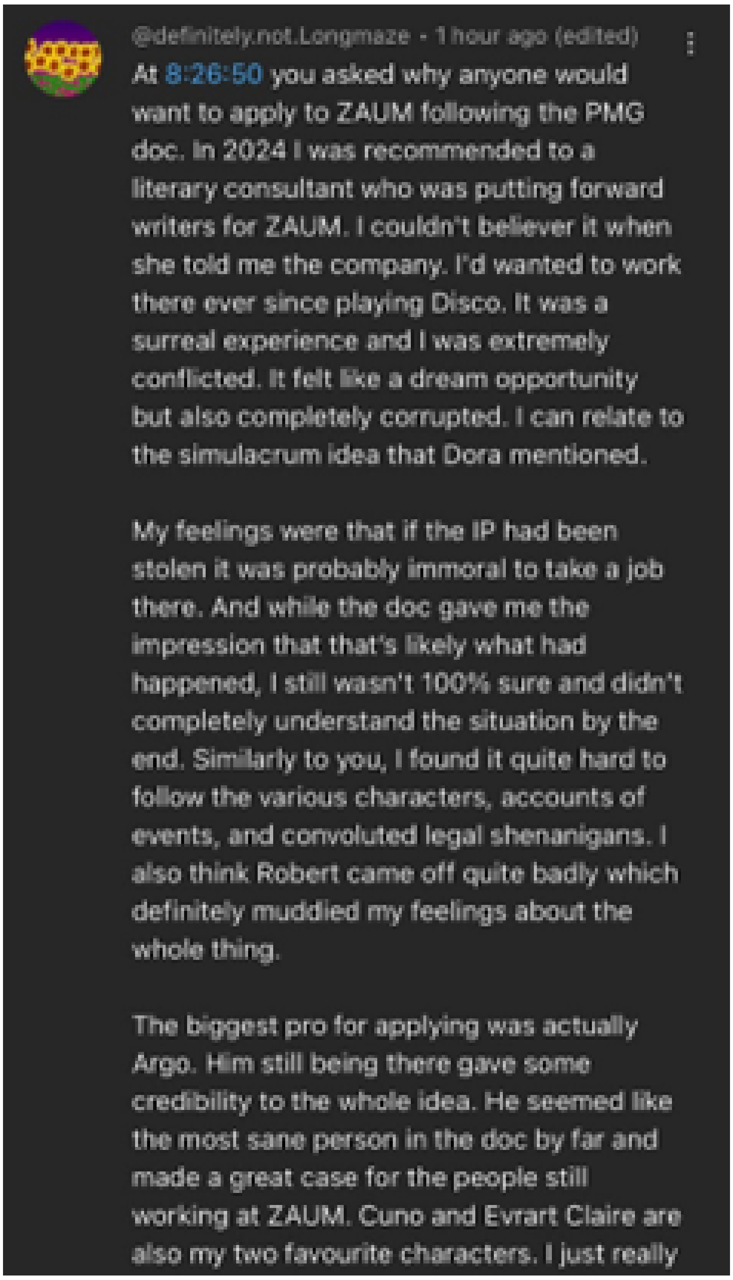
As an example of ZA/UM not taking employment law seriously, here is evidence that ZA/UM was hiring writers during the redundancy procedure, while they were laying off the entire X7 writing team. I also have evidence of specific people who were interviewed for or joined the writing team in the months following the redundancies, as well as job listings being opened in the months following the redundancies for positions which were recently made redundant. Within less than a year, ZA/UM's team size ballooned back to a similar size it was before the redundancies, which could give grounds for a number of unfair dismissal claims.

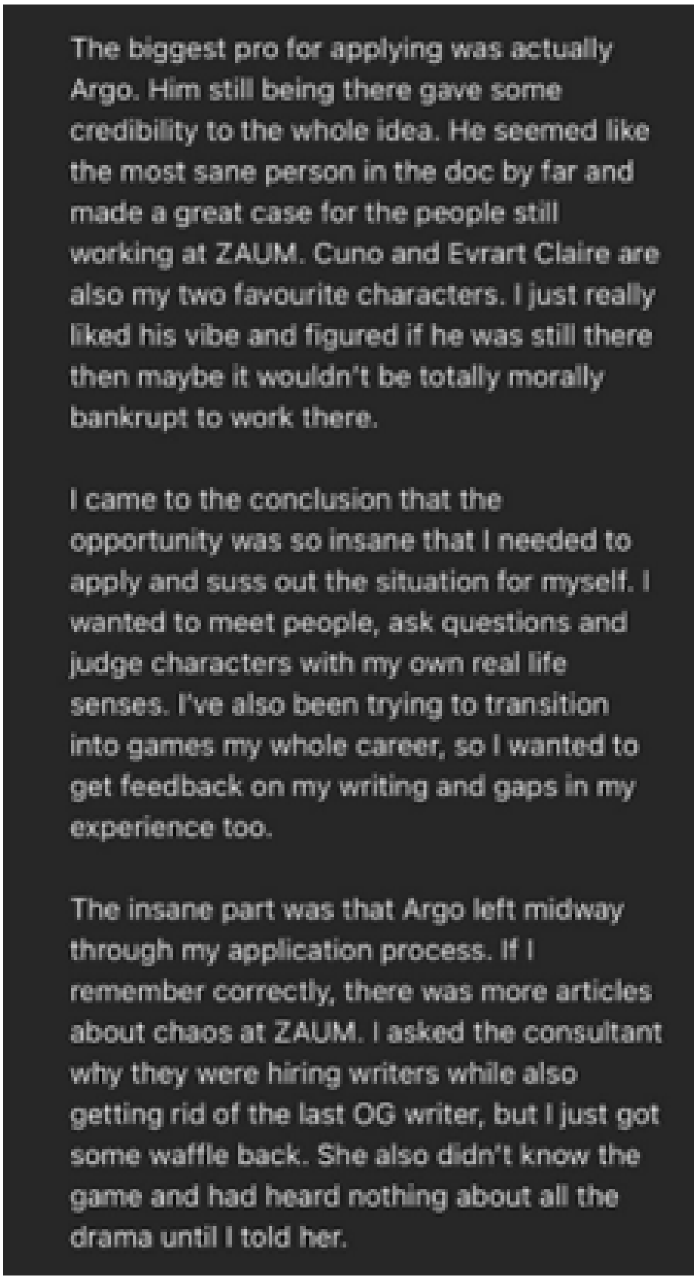


@definitely.not.Longmaze • 1 hour ago (edited)

At 8:26:50 you asked why anyone would want to apply to ZAUM following the PMG doc. In 2024 I was recommended to a literary consultant who was putting forward writers for ZAUM. I couldn't believer it when she told me the company. I'd wanted to work there ever since playing Disco. It was a surreal experience and I was extremely conflicted. It felt like a dream opportunity but also completely corrupted. I can relate to the simulacrum idea that Dora mentioned.

My feelings were that if the IP had been stolen it was probably immoral to take a job there. And while the doc gave me the impression that that's likely what had happened, I still wasn't 100% sure and didn't completely understand the situation by the end. Similarly to you, I found it quite hard to follow the various characters, accounts of events, and convoluted legal shenanigans. I also think Robert came off quite badly which definitely muddied my feelings about the whole thing.

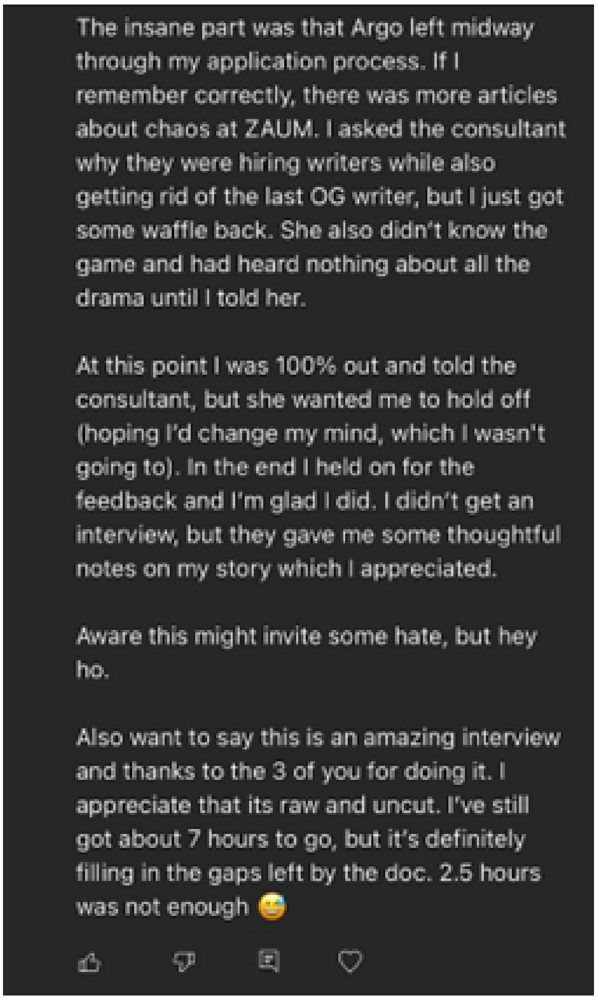
The biggest pro for applying was actually Argo. Him still being there gave some credibility to the whole idea. He seemed like the most sane person in the doc by far and made a great case for the people still working at ZAUM. Cuno and Evrart Claire are also my two favourite characters. I just really



The biggest pro for applying was actually Argo. Him still being there gave some credibility to the whole idea. He seemed like the most sane person in the doc by far and made a great case for the people still working at ZAUM. Cuno and Evrart Claire are also my two favourite characters. I just really liked his vibe and figured if he was still there then maybe it wouldn't be totally morally bankrupt to work there.

I came to the conclusion that the opportunity was so insane that I needed to apply and suss out the situation for myself. I wanted to meet people, ask questions and judge characters with my own real life senses. I've also been trying to transition into games my whole career, so I wanted to get feedback on my writing and gaps in my experience too.

The insane part was that Argo left midway through my application process. If I remember correctly, there was more articles about chaos at ZAUM. I asked the consultant why they were hiring writers while also getting rid of the last OG writer, but I just got some waffle back. She also didn't know the game and had heard nothing about all the drama until I told her.



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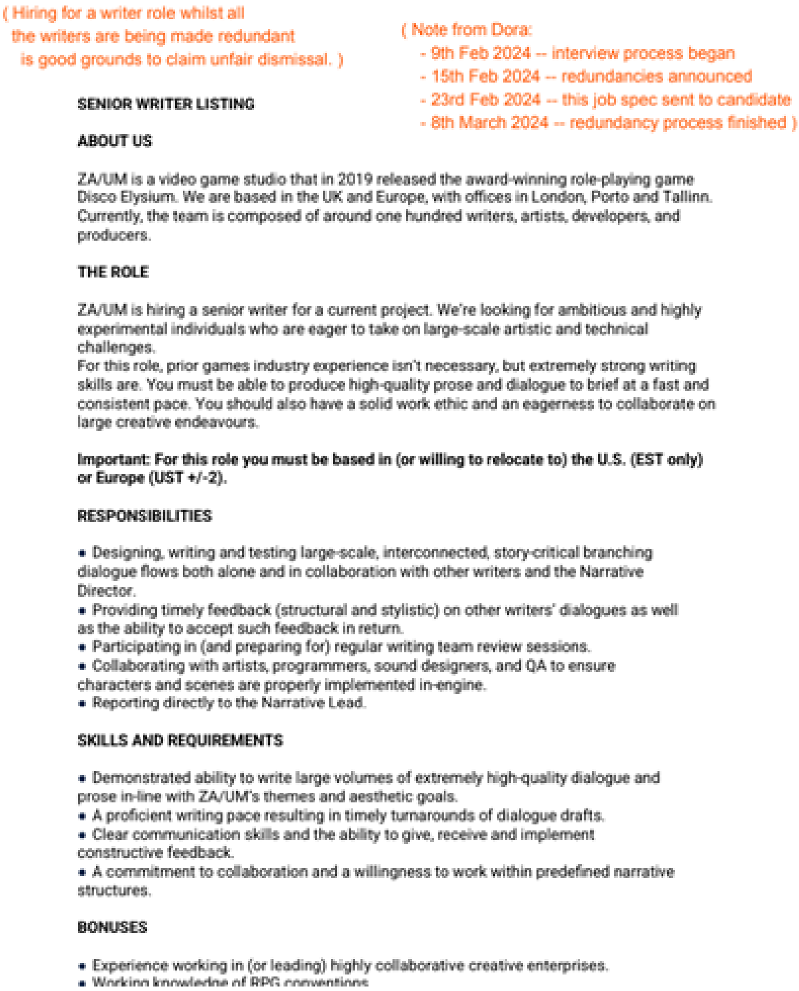
At this point I was 100% out and told the consultant, but she wanted me to hold off (hoping I'd change my mind, which I wasn't going to). In the end I held on for the feedback and I'm glad I did. I didn't get an interview, but they gave me some thoughtful notes on my story which I appreciated.

Aware this might invite some hate, but hey ho.

Also want to say this is an amazing interview and thanks to the 3 of you for doing it. I appreciate that its raw and uncut. I've still got about 7 hours to go, but it's definitely filling in the gaps left by the doc. 2.5 hours was not enough 😅



(Hiring for a writer role whilst all
the writers are being made redundant
is good grounds to claim unfair dismissal.)

(Note from Dora:
- 9th Feb 2024 -- interview process began
- 15th Feb 2024 -- redundancies announced
- 23rd Feb 2024 -- this job spec sent to candidate
- 8th March 2024 -- redundancy process finished)

SENIOR WRITER LISTING

ABOUT US

ZA/UM is a video game studio that in 2019 released the award-winning role-playing game Disco Elysium. We are based in the UK and Europe, with offices in London, Porto and Tallinn. Currently, the team is composed of around one hundred writers, artists, developers, and producers.

THE ROLE

ZA/UM is hiring a senior writer for a current project. We're looking for ambitious and highly experimental individuals who are eager to take on large-scale artistic and technical challenges.
For this role, prior games industry experience isn't necessary, but extremely strong writing skills are. You must be able to produce high-quality prose and dialogue to brief at a fast and consistent pace. You should also have a solid work ethic and an eagerness to collaborate on large creative endeavours.

Important: For this role you must be based in (or willing to relocate to) the U.S. (EST only) or Europe (UST +/-2).

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Designing, writing and testing large-scale, interconnected, story-critical branching dialogue flows both alone and in collaboration with other writers and the Narrative Director.
- Providing timely feedback (structural and stylistic) on other writers' dialogues as well as the ability to accept such feedback in return.
- Participating in (and preparing for) regular writing team review sessions.
- Collaborating with artists, programmers, sound designers, and QA to ensure characters and scenes are properly implemented in-engine.
- Reporting directly to the Narrative Lead.

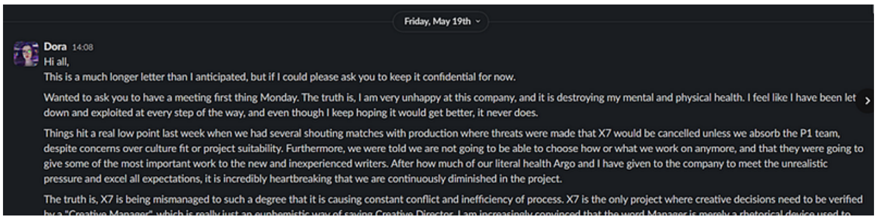
SKILLS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Demonstrated ability to write large volumes of extremely high-quality dialogue and prose in-line with ZA/UM's themes and aesthetic goals.
- A proficient writing pace resulting in timely turnarounds of dialogue drafts.
- Clear communication skills and the ability to give, receive and implement constructive feedback.
- A commitment to collaboration and a willingness to work within predefined narrative structures.

BONUSES

- Experience working in (or leading) highly collaborative creative enterprises.
- Working knowledge of RPG conventions

Next, here is proof of HR complaints I made about the studio climate in 2023, of which there were more not listed here and specifically regarding managers and directors at the company, demonstrating an ongoing series of issues, and none of which were properly investigated or handled according to formal ACAS-recommended procedures by HR.



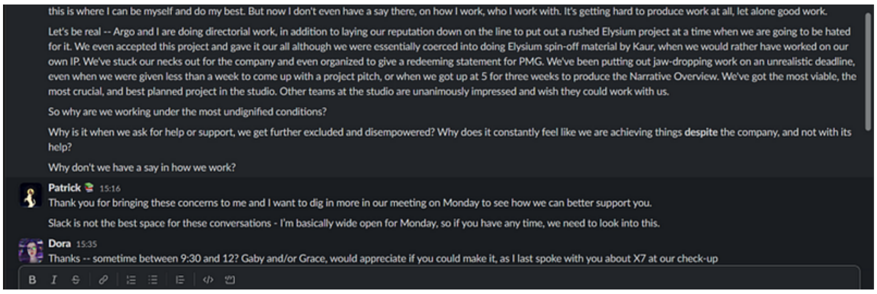
Friday, May 19th

Dora 14:08
Hi all,
This is a much longer letter than I anticipated, but if I could please ask you to keep it confidential for now.

Wanted to ask you to have a meeting first thing Monday. The truth is, I am very unhappy at this company, and it is destroying my mental and physical health. I feel like I have been let down and exploited at every step of the way, and even though I keep hoping it would get better, it never does.

Things hit a real low point last week when we had several shouting matches with production where threats were made that X7 would be cancelled unless we absorb the P1 team, despite concerns over culture fit or project suitability. Furthermore, we were told we are not going to be able to choose how or what we work on anymore, and that they were going to give some of the most important work to the new and inexperienced writers. After how much of our literal health Argo and I have given to the company to meet the unrealistic pressure and excel all expectations, it is incredibly heartbreaking that we are continuously diminished in the project.

The truth is, X7 is being mismanaged to such a degree that it is causing constant conflict and inefficiency of process. X7 is the only project where creative decisions need to be verified by a "Creative Manager" which is really just an euphemistic way of saying Creative Director. I am increasingly convinced that the word Manager is merely a rhetorical device used to



this is where I can be myself and do my best. But now I don't even have a say there, on how I work, who I work with. It's getting hard to produce work at all, let alone good work.

Let's be real -- Argo and I are doing directorial work, in addition to laying our reputation down on the line to put out a rushed Elysium project at a time when we are going to be hated for it. We even accepted this project and gave it our all although we were essentially coerced into doing Elysium spin-off material by Kaur, when we would rather have worked on our own IP. We've stuck our necks out for the company and even organized to give a redeeming statement for PMG. We've been putting out jaw-dropping work on an unrealistic deadline, even when we were given less than a week to come up with a project pitch, or when we got up at 5 for three weeks to produce the Narrative Overview. We've got the most viable, the most crucial, and best planned project in the studio. Other teams at the studio are unanimously impressed and wish they could work with us.

So why are we working under the most undignified conditions?

Why is it when we ask for help or support, we get further excluded and disempowered? Why does it constantly feel like we are achieving things **despite** the company, and not with its help?

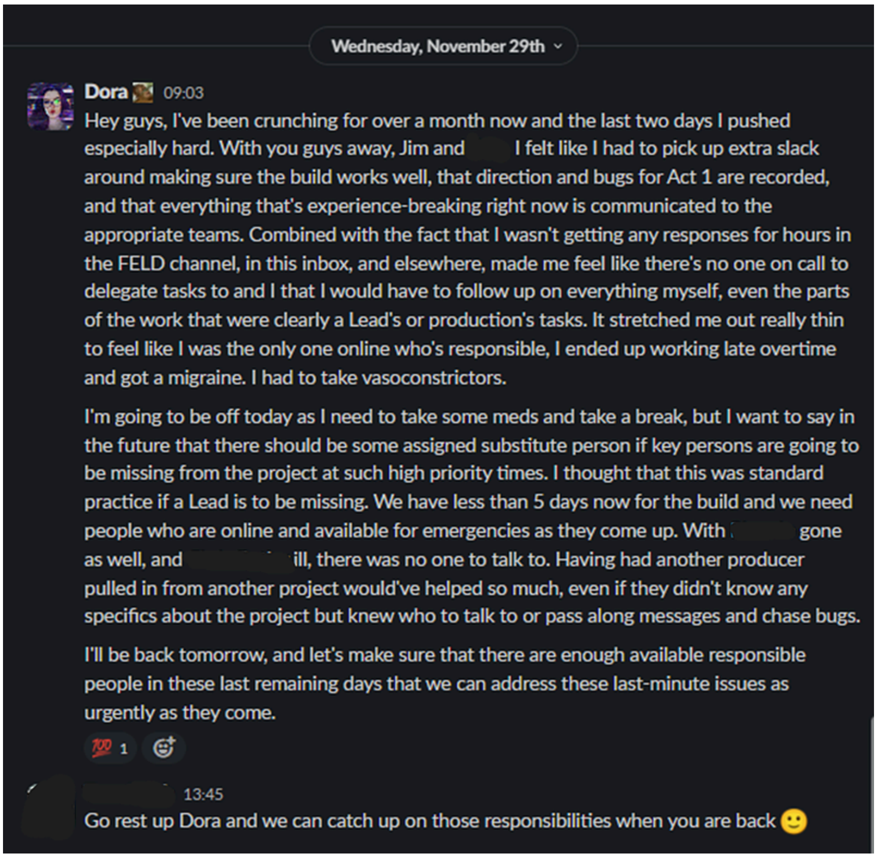
Why don't we have a say in how we work?

Patrick 15:16
Thank you for bringing these concerns to me and I want to dig in more in our meeting on Monday to see how we can better support you.

Slack is not the best space for these conversations - I'm basically wide open for Monday, so if you have any time, we need to look into this.

Dora 15:35
Thanks -- sometime between 9:30 and 12? Gaby and/or Grace, would appreciate if you could make it, as I last spoke with you about X7 at our check-up

Here's an especially concerning complaint I shared with studio production after two months of non-stop crunch, which caused me migraine attacks and having to be medicated. I also have plenty of evidence of other people complaining about crunch at production meetings.



Wednesday, November 29th

Dora 09:03
Hey guys, I've been crunching for over a month now and the last two days I pushed especially hard. With you guys away, Jim and [redacted] I felt like I had to pick up extra slack around making sure the build works well, that direction and bugs for Act 1 are recorded, and that everything that's experience-breaking right now is communicated to the appropriate teams. Combined with the fact that I wasn't getting any responses for hours in the FELD channel, in this inbox, and elsewhere, made me feel like there's no one on call to delegate tasks to and I that I would have to follow up on everything myself, even the parts of the work that were clearly a Lead's or production's tasks. It stretched me out really thin to feel like I was the only one online who's responsible, I ended up working late overtime and got a migraine. I had to take vasoconstrictors.

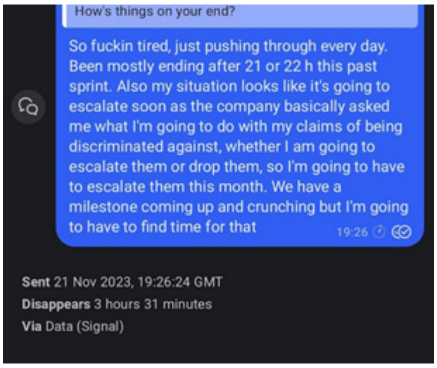
I'm going to be off today as I need to take some meds and take a break, but I want to say in the future that there should be some assigned substitute person if key persons are going to be missing from the project at such high priority times. I thought that this was standard practice if a Lead is to be missing. We have less than 5 days now for the build and we need people who are online and available for emergencies as they come up. With [redacted] gone as well, and [redacted] ill, there was no one to talk to. Having had another producer pulled in from another project would've helped so much, even if they didn't know any specifics about the project but knew who to talk to or pass along messages and chase bugs.

I'll be back tomorrow, and let's make sure that there are enough available responsible people in these last remaining days that we can address these last-minute issues as urgently as they come.

💯 1

[redacted] 13:45
Go rest up Dora and we can catch up on those responsibilities when you are back 🙂

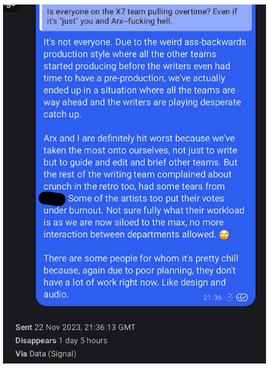
Here is a large number of messages exchanged with colleagues about the physical, mental and health toll that crunch and consistent mistreatment from management was taking on both Argo and I throughout X7 production:



How's things on your end?

So fuckin tired, just pushing through every day. Been mostly ending after 21 or 22 h this past sprint. Also my situation looks like it's going to escalate soon as the company basically asked me what I'm going to do with my claims of being discriminated against, whether I am going to escalate them or drop them, so I'm going to have to escalate them this month. We have a milestone coming up and crunching but I'm going to have to find time for that 19:26

Sent 21 Nov 2023, 19:26:24 GMT
Disappears 3 hours 31 minutes
Via Data (Signal)



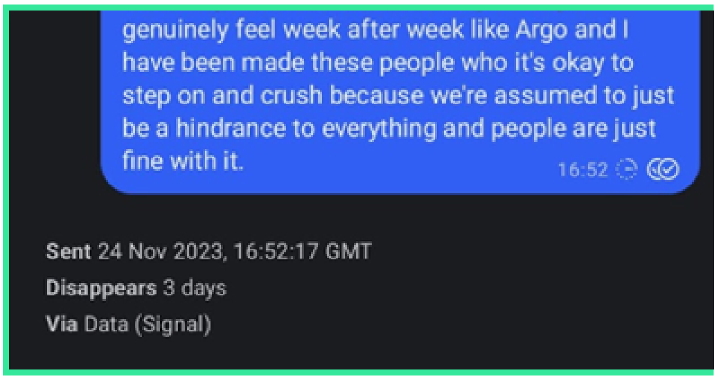
Is everyone on the X7 team pulling overtime? Even if it's "just" you and Arx--fucking hell.

It's not everyone. Due to the weird ass-backwards production style where all the other teams started producing before the writers even had time to have a pre-production, we've actually ended up in a situation where all the teams are way ahead and the writers are playing desperate catch up.

Arx and I are definitely hit worst because we've taken the most onto ourselves, not just to write but to guide and edit and brief other teams. But the rest of the writing team complained about crunch in the retro too, had some tears from [redacted] Some of the artists too put their votes under burnout. Not sure fully what their workload is as we are now siloed to the max, no more interaction between departments allowed. 🙄

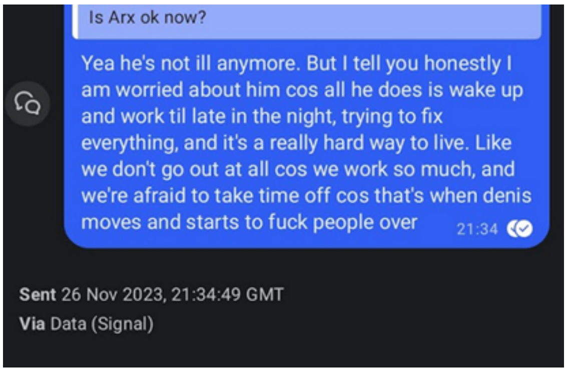
There are some people for whom it's pretty chill because, again due to poor planning, they don't have a lot of work right now. Like design and audio. 21:36

Sent 22 Nov 2023, 21:36:13 GMT
Disappears 1 day 5 hours
Via Data (Signal)



genuinely feel week after week like Argo and I have been made these people who it's okay to step on and crush because we're assumed to just be a hindrance to everything and people are just fine with it. 16:52

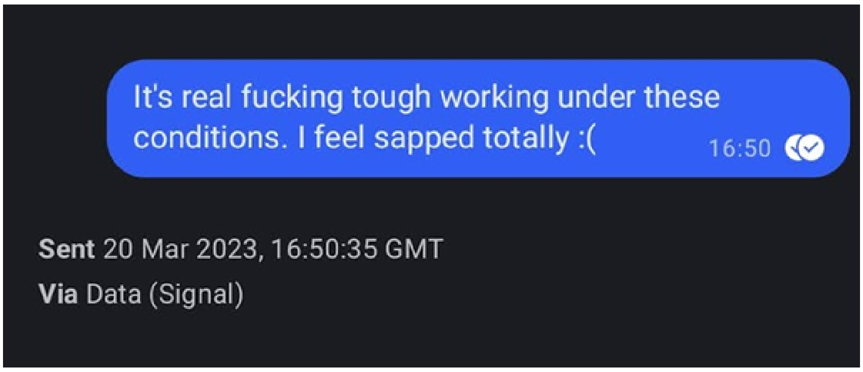
Sent 24 Nov 2023, 16:52:17 GMT
Disappears 3 days
Via Data (Signal)



Is Arx ok now?

Yea he's not ill anymore. But I tell you honestly I am worried about him cos all he does is wake up and work til late in the night, trying to fix everything, and it's a really hard way to live. Like we don't go out at all cos we work so much, and we're afraid to take time off cos that's when denis moves and starts to fuck people over 21:34

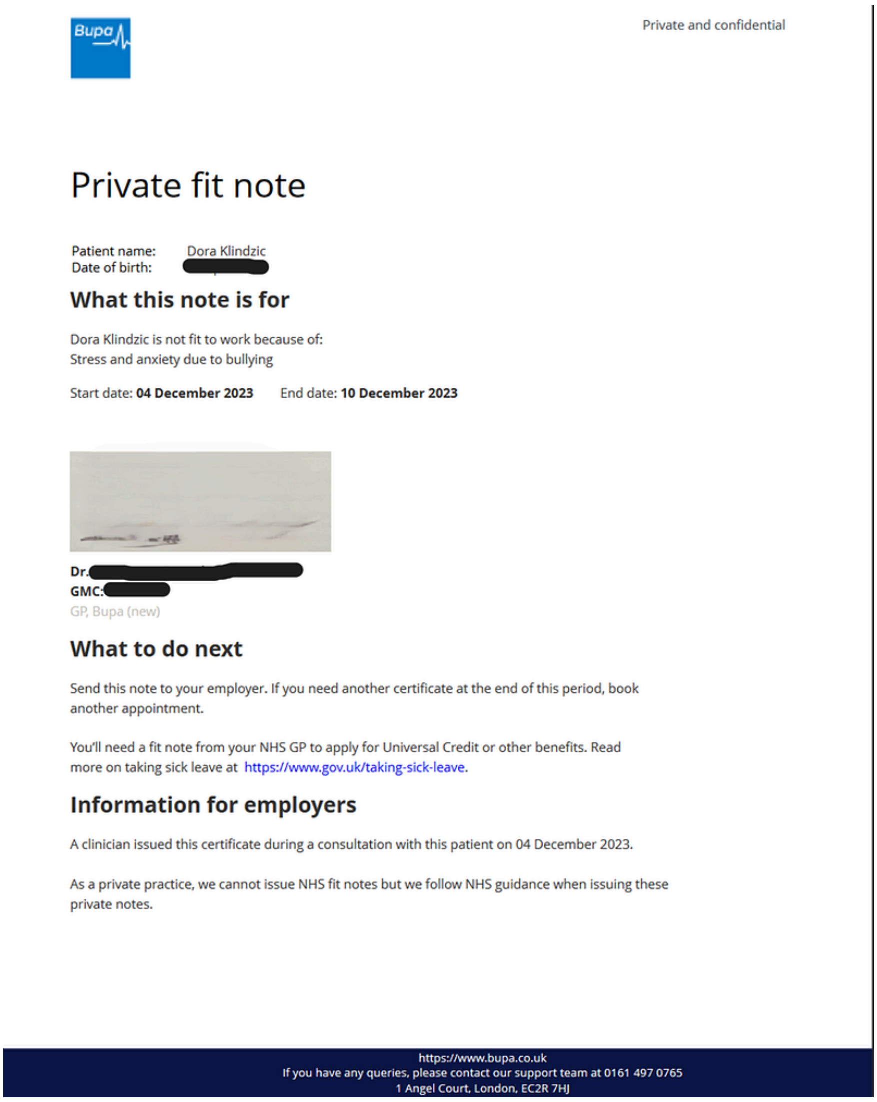
Sent 26 Nov 2023, 21:34:49 GMT
Via Data (Signal)



It's real fucking tough working under these conditions. I feel sapped totally :(16:50

Sent 20 Mar 2023, 16:50:35 GMT
Via Data (Signal)

Here's when I was rendered medically unfit to work because of months of crunch and bullying from ZA/UM management:



Private and confidential

Private fit note

Patient name: Dora Klindzic
Date of birth: [redacted]

What this note is for

Dora Klindzic is not fit to work because of:
Stress and anxiety due to bullying

Start date: **04 December 2023** End date: **10 December 2023**

Dr. [redacted]
GMC: [redacted]
GP, Bupa (new)

What to do next

Send this note to your employer. If you need another certificate at the end of this period, book another appointment.

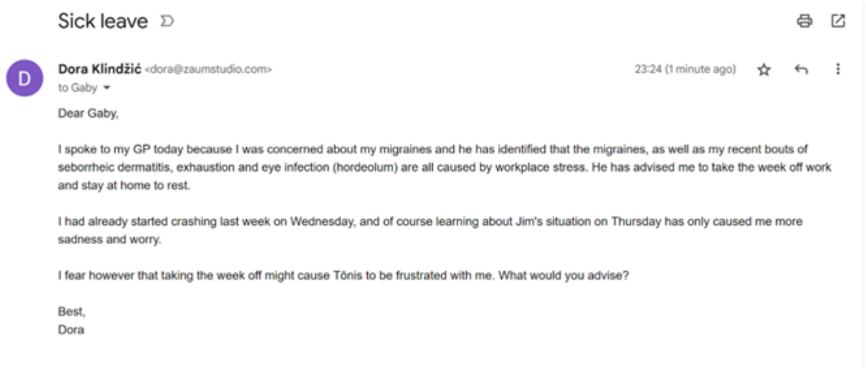
You'll need a fit note from your NHS GP to apply for Universal Credit or other benefits. Read more on taking sick leave at https://www.gov.uk/taking-sick-leave.

Information for employers

A clinician issued this certificate during a consultation with this patient on 04 December 2023.

As a private practice, we cannot issue NHS fit notes but we follow NHS guidance when issuing these private notes.

https://www.bupa.co.uk
If you have any queries, please contact our support team at 0161 497 0765
1 Angel Court, London, EC2R 7HJ



Sick leave

Dora Klindžić <dora@zaumstudio.com>
to Gaby
23:24 (1 minute ago)

Dear Gaby,

I spoke to my GP today because I was concerned about my migraines and he has identified that the migraines, as well as my recent bouts of seborrheic dermatitis, exhaustion and eye infection (hordeolum) are all caused by workplace stress. He has advised me to take the week off work and stay at home to rest.

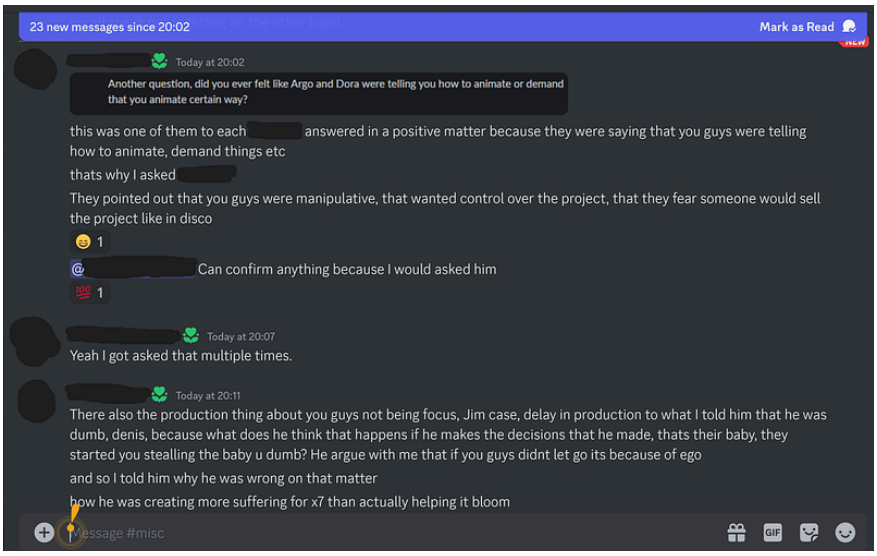
I had already started crashing last week on Wednesday, and of course learning about Jim's situation on Thursday has only caused me more sadness and worry.

I fear however that taking the week off might cause Tõnis to be frustrated with me. What would you advise?

Best,
Dora

For pointing out these issues and more in my formal complaint in late 2023 which ended up totalling some 150 pages including the filed Appeal, ZA/UM conducted a retaliatory campaign against Argo and I, stoking discontent against us while we were busy crunching and working or on medical leave, and approaching various employees of the company to ask them whether they could contrive anything Argo or I had done that would be a fireable offence. Their effort was unsuccessful and they could not present us nor our trade union representative with any actionable evidence against us. Just six months before this, they were all too happy for Argo to be the public face of the company in PMG's first documentary. Why would they have done this if Argo was a troubled employee all along as they now claim? Argo had been working in the company for seven years at that point.

Here are various former and current ZA/UM employees, whose identities are known to me, reporting that they were subjected to a fishing expedition in search of reasons to get us fired—and to scapegoat us for the death warrant management had signed for Locust City already a long time ago. Some of these people were called to testify on misconduct committed by Tõnis and a number of ZA/UM leads, however they claim that they were never properly questioned about ZA/UM's misconduct, but were instead interrogated about Argo or myself even though we had never done anything wrong to them. All of these people who refused to testify against us and pointed out management's hypocrisy were placed in the redundancy pool and lost their jobs. I have more evidence of this, but for brevity…



[redacted] [redacted] Today at 20:02

Another question, did you ever felt like Argo and Dora were telling you how to animate or demand that you animate certain way?

this was one of them to each [redacted] answered in a positive matter because they were saying that you guys were telling how to animate, demand things etc

thats why I asked [redacted]

They pointed out that you guys were manipulative, that wanted control over the project, that they fear someone would sell the project like in disco

😄 1

@[redacted] Can confirm anything because I would asked him

💯 1

[redacted] [redacted] Today at 20:07

Yeah I got asked that multiple times.

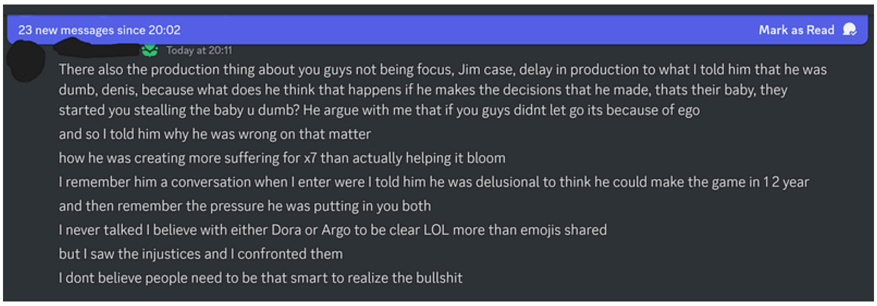
[redacted] [redacted] Today at 20:11

There also the production thing about you guys not being focus, Jim case, delay in production to what I told him that he was dumb, denis, because what does he think that happens if he makes the decisions that he made, thats their baby, they started you stealling the baby u dumb? He argue with me that if you guys didnt let go its because of ego

and so I told him why he was wrong on that matter

how he was creating more suffering for x7 than actually helping it bloom

15th February 2024



[redacted] Today at 20:11

There also the production thing about you guys not being focus, Jim case, delay in production to what I told him that he was dumb, denis, because what does he think that happens if he makes the decisions that he made, thats their baby, they started you stealling the baby u dumb? He argue with me that if you guys didnt let go its because of ego

and so I told him why he was wrong on that matter

how he was creating more suffering for x7 than actually helping it bloom

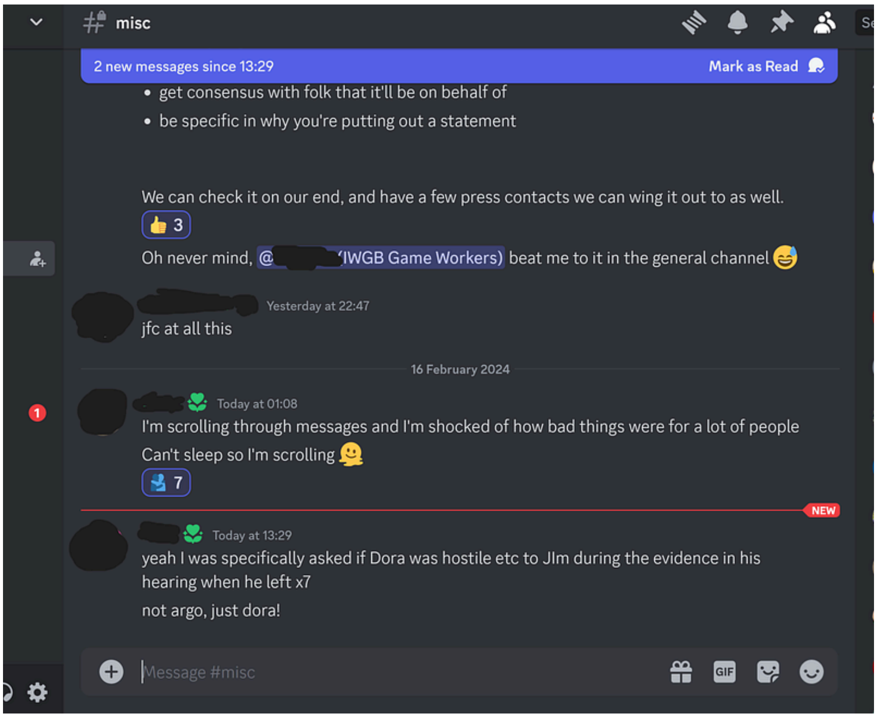
I remember him a conversation when I enter were I told him he was delusional to think he could make the game in 1 2 year

and then remember the pressure he was putting in you both

I never talked I believe with either Dora or Argo to be clear LOL more than emojis shared

but I saw the injustices and I confronted them

I dont believe people need to be that smart to realize the bullshit



- get consensus with folk that it'll be on behalf of
- be specific in why you're putting out a statement

We can check it on our end, and have a few press contacts we can wing it out to as well.

👍 3

Oh never mind, @[redacted]'IWGB Game Workers) beat me to it in the general channel 😅

[redacted] Yesterday at 22:47

jfc at all this

16 February 2024

[redacted] Today at 01:08

I'm scrolling through messages and I'm shocked of how bad things were for a lot of people

Can't sleep so I'm scrolling 🫠

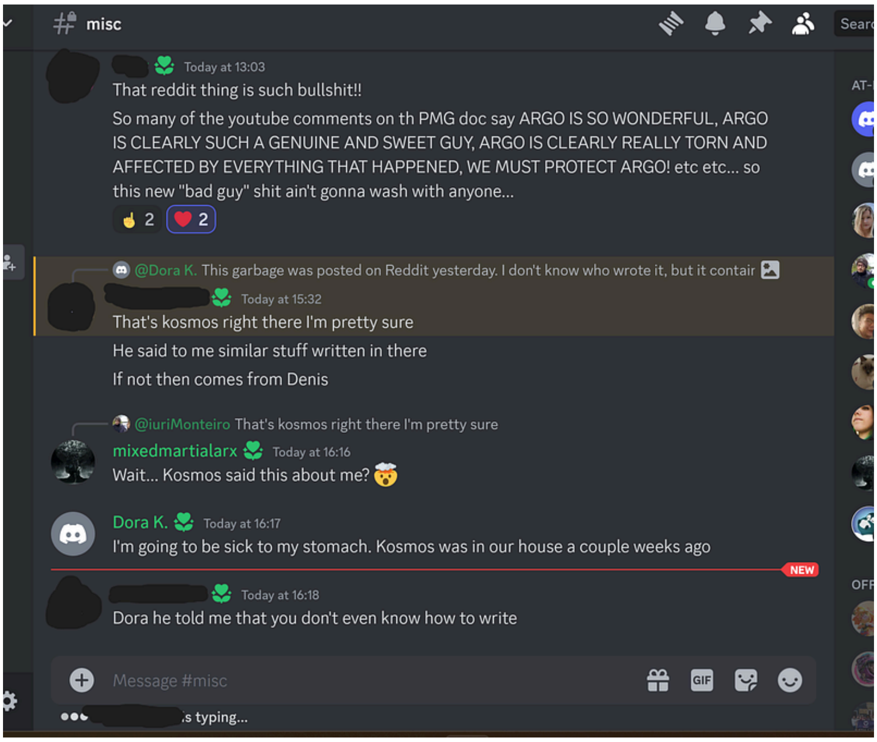
7

[redacted] Today at 13:29

yeah I was specifically asked if Dora was hostile etc to JIm during the evidence in his hearing when he left x7

not argo, just dora!

16th February 2024



[redacted] Today at 13:03
That reddit thing is such bullshit!!
So many of the youtube comments on th PMG doc say ARGO IS SO WONDERFUL, ARGO IS CLEARLY SUCH A GENUINE AND SWEET GUY, ARGO IS CLEARLY REALLY TORN AND AFFECTED BY EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED, WE MUST PROTECT ARGO! etc etc... so this new "bad guy" shit ain't gonna wash with anyone...
☝ 2 ❤ 2

@Dora K. This garbage was posted on Reddit yesterday. I don't know who wrote it, but it contair
[redacted] Today at 15:32
That's kosmos right there I'm pretty sure
He said to me similar stuff written in there
If not then comes from Denis

@iuriMonteiro That's kosmos right there I'm pretty sure
mixedmartialarx Today at 16:16
Wait... Kosmos said this about me? 🤯

Dora K. Today at 16:17
I'm going to be sick to my stomach. Kosmos was in our house a couple weeks ago

[redacted] Today at 16:18
Dora he told me that you don't even know how to write

Message #misc

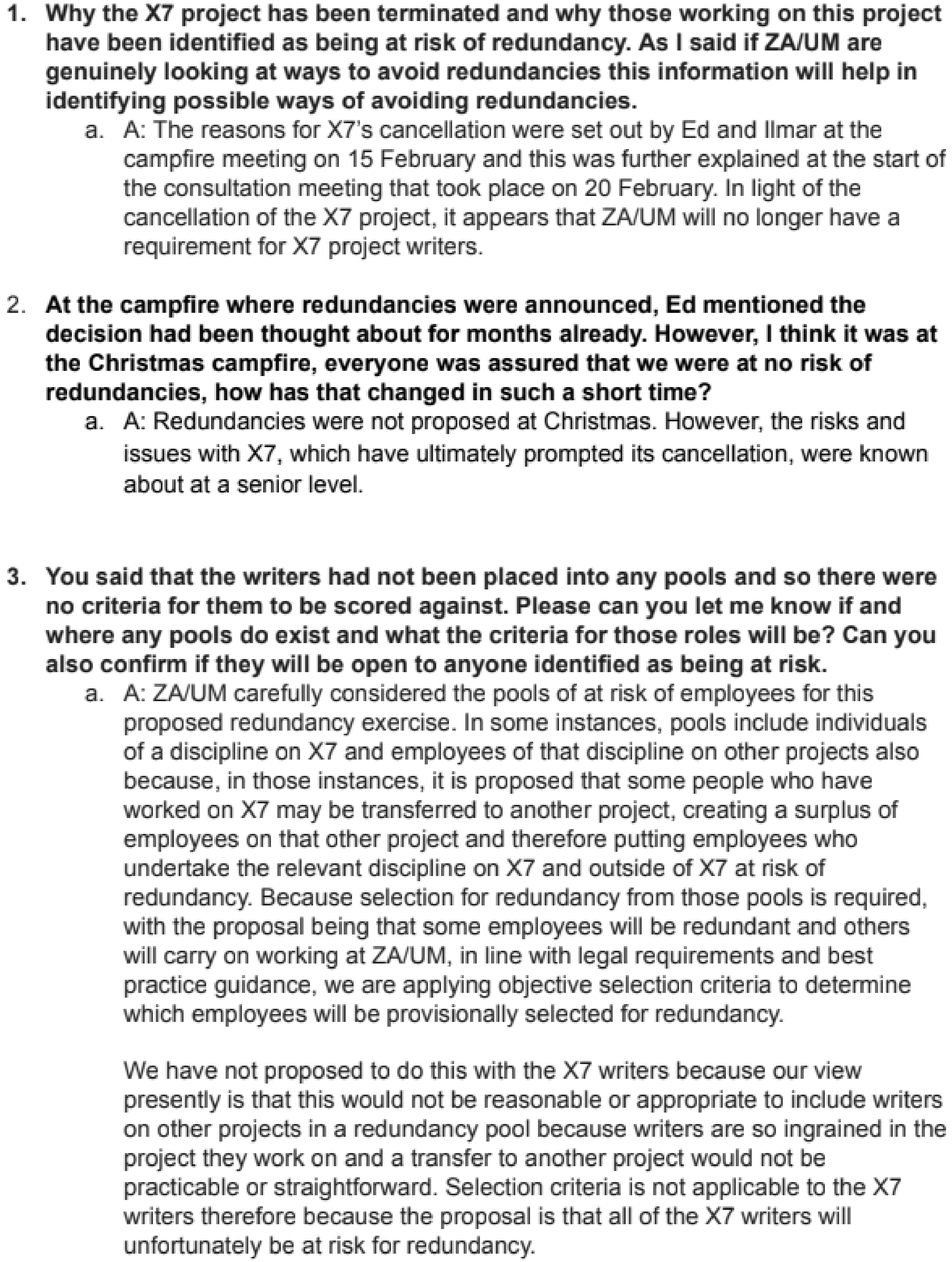
[redacted]s typing...

17th February 2024

I never committed any fireable offence nor was there any evidence shown against me *for nearly three months* when I was ready to defend myself with my union representative. Instead, we were told the project is abruptly cancelled and that we, alongside more than 20 other people, were being made redundant. Even our union representative said it was a sham redundancy, as ZA/UM HR could not even answer simple questions on why the project is being cut, or why certain roles were redundant. Argo himself was told that he is redundant because his writing skills would not apply to C4, which is simply absurd, since the tools and pipelines were identical and we had started out as project C4 members 1.5 years earlier. Furthermore, every single writer on C4 was Argo's junior whom he had interviewed for their jobs and mentored into their roles at some point. Remember, writers had just been moved from P1 to X7 six months earlier, despite these games being of radically different genres (a shooter vs a cRPG), so moving writers around was never a problem for the studio before.

The C4 directors, all of them with fewer years uninterrupted tenure than Argo, were rewarded with London wining, dining and privileged shares in the company for carving up this redundancy cake.

Here's the incompetent justification for the rushed X7 redundancy provided by the ZA/UM HR team on 20th February 2024, in response to a questionnaire sent by our WGGB trade union representative:

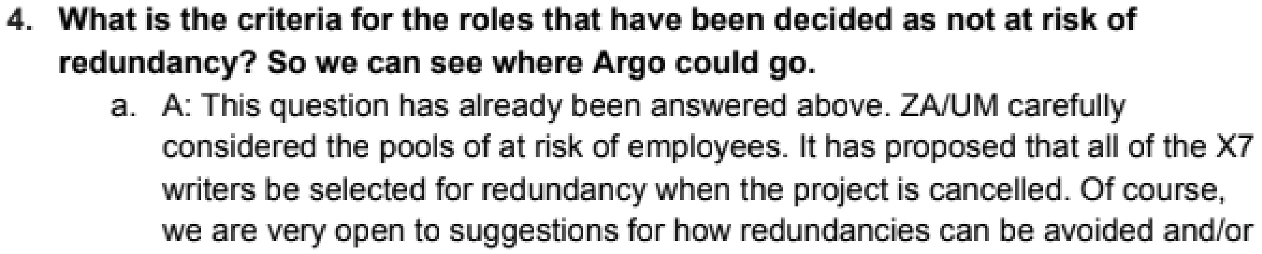


1. **Why the X7 project has been terminated and why those working on this project have been identified as being at risk of redundancy. As I said if ZA/UM are genuinely looking at ways to avoid redundancies this information will help in identifying possible ways of avoiding redundancies.**
    a. A: The reasons for X7's cancellation were set out by Ed and Ilmar at the campfire meeting on 15 February and this was further explained at the start of the consultation meeting that took place on 20 February. In light of the cancellation of the X7 project, it appears that ZA/UM will no longer have a requirement for X7 project writers.

2. **At the campfire where redundancies were announced, Ed mentioned the decision had been thought about for months already. However, I think it was at the Christmas campfire, everyone was assured that we were at no risk of redundancies, how has that changed in such a short time?**
    a. A: Redundancies were not proposed at Christmas. However, the risks and issues with X7, which have ultimately prompted its cancellation, were known about at a senior level.

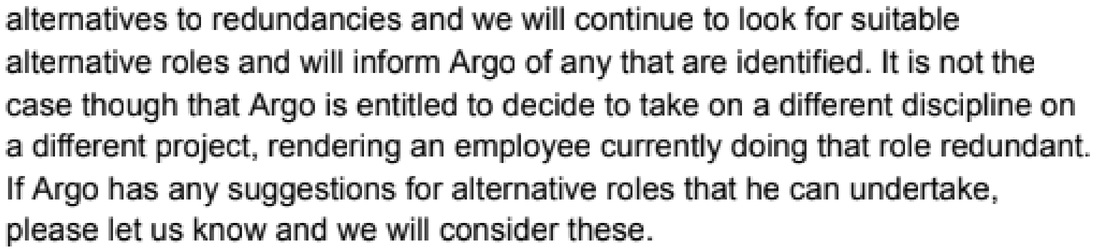
3. **You said that the writers had not been placed into any pools and so there were no criteria for them to be scored against. Please can you let me know if and where any pools do exist and what the criteria for those roles will be? Can you also confirm if they will be open to anyone identified as being at risk.**
    a. A: ZA/UM carefully considered the pools of at risk of employees for this proposed redundancy exercise. In some instances, pools include individuals of a discipline on X7 and employees of that discipline on other projects also because, in those instances, it is proposed that some people who have worked on X7 may be transferred to another project, creating a surplus of employees on that other project and therefore putting employees who undertake the relevant discipline on X7 and outside of X7 at risk of redundancy. Because selection for redundancy from those pools is required, with the proposal being that some employees will be redundant and others will carry on working at ZA/UM, in line with legal requirements and best practice guidance, we are applying objective selection criteria to determine which employees will be provisionally selected for redundancy.

       We have not proposed to do this with the X7 writers because our view presently is that this would not be reasonable or appropriate to include writers on other projects in a redundancy pool because writers are so ingrained in the project they work on and a transfer to another project would not be practicable or straightforward. Selection criteria is not applicable to the X7 writers therefore because the proposal is that all of the X7 writers will unfortunately be at risk for redundancy.



4. **What is the criteria for the roles that have been decided as not at risk of redundancy? So we can see where Argo could go.**
    a. A: This question has already been answered above. ZA/UM carefully considered the pools of at risk of employees. It has proposed that all of the X7 writers be selected for redundancy when the project is cancelled. Of course, we are very open to suggestions for how redundancies can be avoided and/or

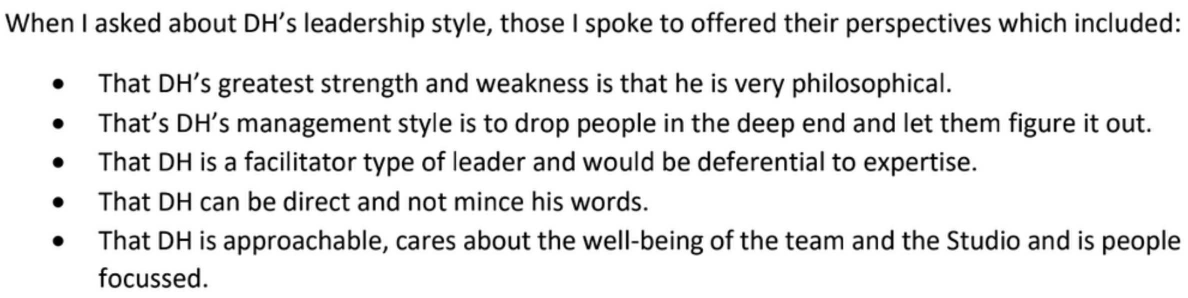
[redacted]



alternatives to redundancies and we will continue to look for suitable alternative roles and will inform Argo of any that are identified. It is not the case though that Argo is entitled to decide to take on a different discipline on a different project, rendering an employee currently doing that role redundant. If Argo has any suggestions for alternative roles that he can undertake, please let us know and we will consider these.

It’s worth noting that, for some reason, it was permitted for the formal X7 Narrative Leads Jim and Chris to transfer to C4 and become writers, despite having far less games writing experience than most of us on the X7 team, after conveniently having given testimony that claimed Tõnis was a wonderful person and denied witnessing his and Phil’s abusive conduct, which was recorded on tape. They never even once reached out to all of us who were about to lose our jobs, and in my case even my immigration status. I suppose this is the “true leadership” example Tõnis speaks about?

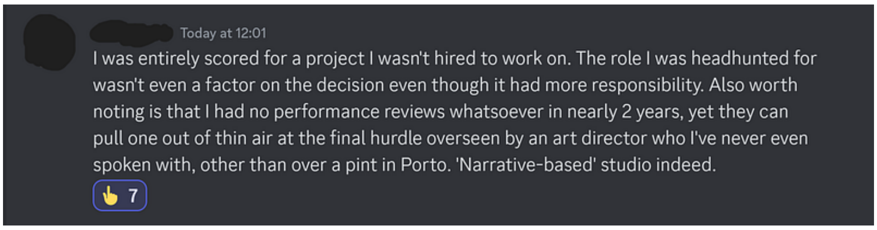
Here is how the people who got to keep their jobs described Tõnis Haavel (alias DH, Denis Havel) to the official investigator who was investigating him for bullying, harassment, gender discrimination and misconduct in January 2024:



When I asked about DH’s leadership style, those I spoke to offered their perspectives which included:

- That DH’s greatest strength and weakness is that he is very philosophical.
- That’s DH’s management style is to drop people in the deep end and let them figure it out.
- That DH is a facilitator type of leader and would be deferential to expertise.
- That DH can be direct and not mince his words.
- That DH is approachable, cares about the well-being of the team and the Studio and is people focussed.

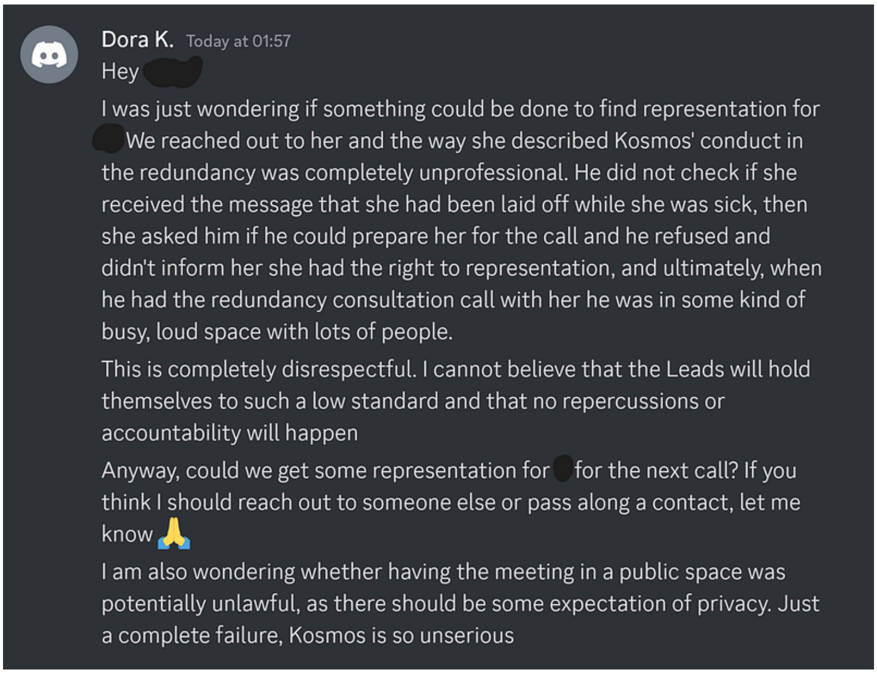
Here are some examples of the dubious selection procedures and unprofessional leadership conduct during the ZA/UM redundancy process. There are many, many more:



[redacted] [redacted] Today at 12:01

I was entirely scored for a project I wasn't hired to work on. The role I was headhunted for wasn't even a factor on the decision even though it had more responsibility. Also worth noting is that I had no performance reviews whatsoever in nearly 2 years, yet they can pull one out of thin air at the final hurdle overseen by an art director who I've never even spoken with, other than over a pint in Porto. 'Narrative-based' studio indeed.

👆 7



Dora K. Today at 01:57

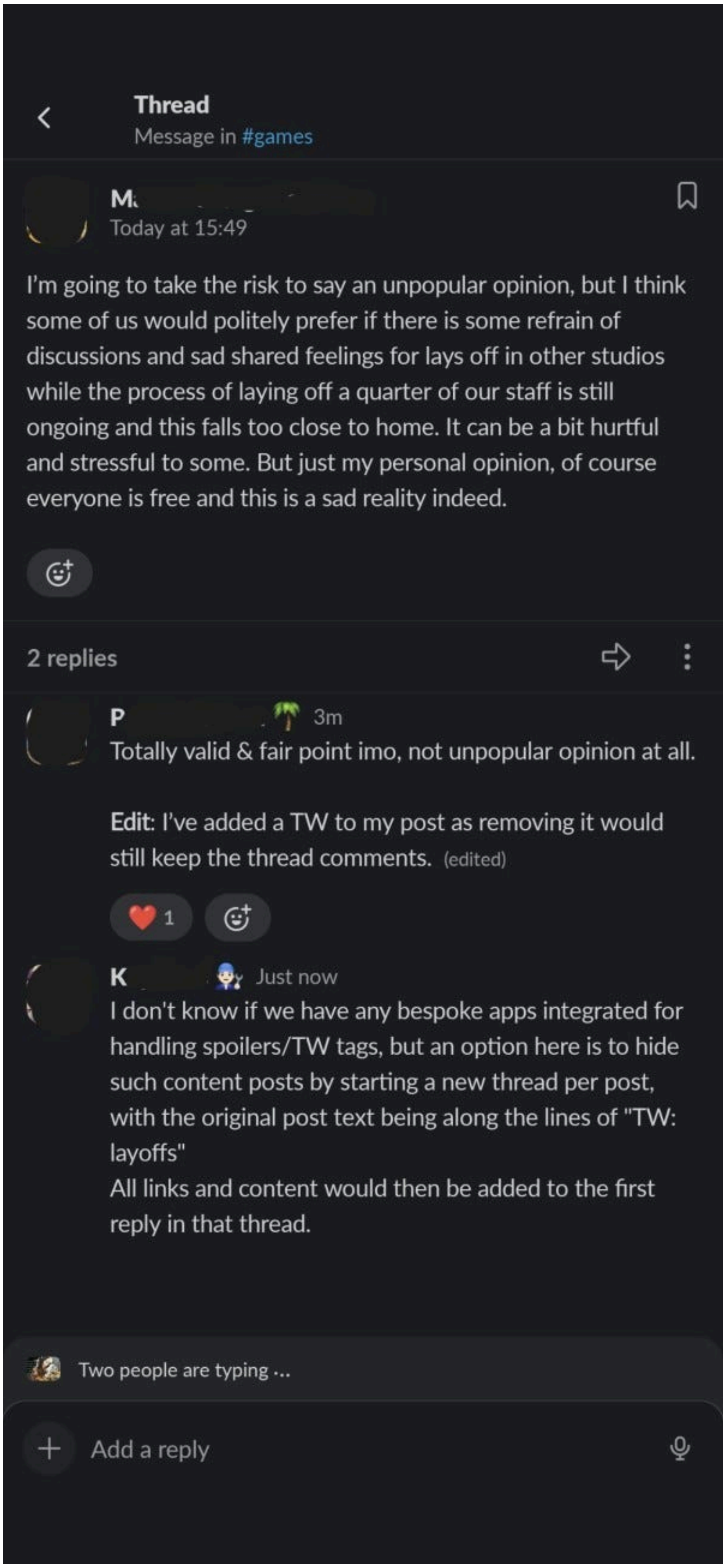
Hey [redacted]

I was just wondering if something could be done to find representation for [redacted] We reached out to her and the way she described Kosmos' conduct in the redundancy was completely unprofessional. He did not check if she received the message that she had been laid off while she was sick, then she asked him if he could prepare her for the call and he refused and didn't inform her she had the right to representation, and ultimately, when he had the redundancy consultation call with her he was in some kind of busy, loud space with lots of people.

This is completely disrespectful. I cannot believe that the Leads will hold themselves to such a low standard and that no repercussions or accountability will happen

Anyway, could we get some representation for [redacted] for the next call? If you think I should reach out to someone else or pass along a contact, let me know 🙏

I am also wondering whether having the meeting in a public space was potentially unlawful, as there should be some expectation of privacy. Just a complete failure, Kosmos is so unserious



Thread
Message in #games

[redacted] **M.**[redacted]
Today at 15:49

I'm going to take the risk to say an unpopular opinion, but I think some of us would politely prefer if there is some refrain of discussions and sad shared feelings for lays off in other studios while the process of laying off a quarter of our staff is still ongoing and this falls too close to home. It can be a bit hurtful and stressful to some. But just my personal opinion, of course everyone is free and this is a sad reality indeed.

2 replies

[redacted] **P**[redacted] 🌴 3m
Totally valid & fair point imo, not unpopular opinion at all.

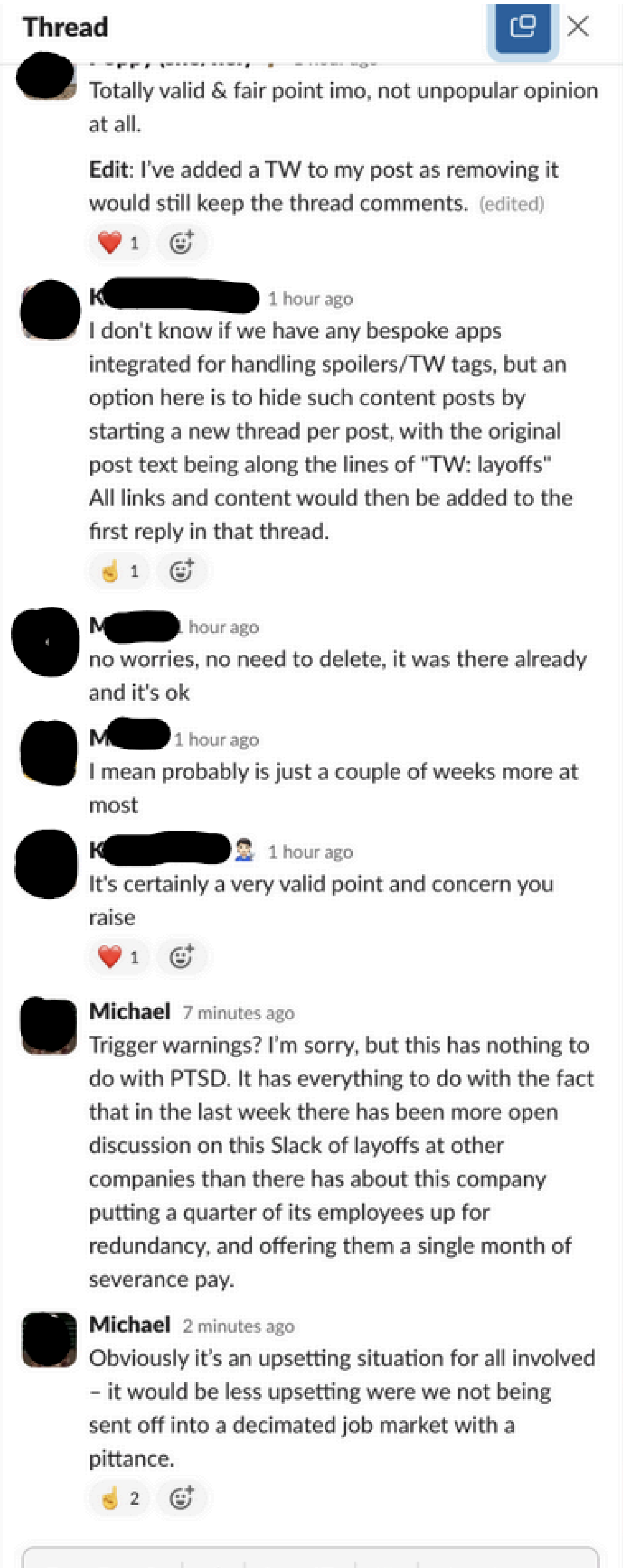
Edit: I've added a TW to my post as removing it would still keep the thread comments. (edited)

❤️ 1

[redacted] **K**[redacted] 🧑‍🔬 Just now
I don't know if we have any bespoke apps integrated for handling spoilers/TW tags, but an option here is to hide such content posts by starting a new thread per post, with the original post text being along the lines of "TW: layoffs"
All links and content would then be added to the first reply in that thread.

Two people are typing ...

Add a reply



Thread

[redacted] Totally valid & fair point imo, not unpopular opinion at all.

Edit: I've added a TW to my post as removing it would still keep the thread comments. (edited)

❤️ 1

[redacted] **K**[redacted] 1 hour ago
I don't know if we have any bespoke apps integrated for handling spoilers/TW tags, but an option here is to hide such content posts by starting a new thread per post, with the original post text being along the lines of "TW: layoffs"
All links and content would then be added to the first reply in that thread.

☝️ 1

[redacted] **M**[redacted] hour ago
no worries, no need to delete, it was there already and it's ok

[redacted] **M**[redacted] 1 hour ago
I mean probably is just a couple of weeks more at most

[redacted] **K**[redacted] 🧑‍💼 1 hour ago
It's certainly a very valid point and concern you raise

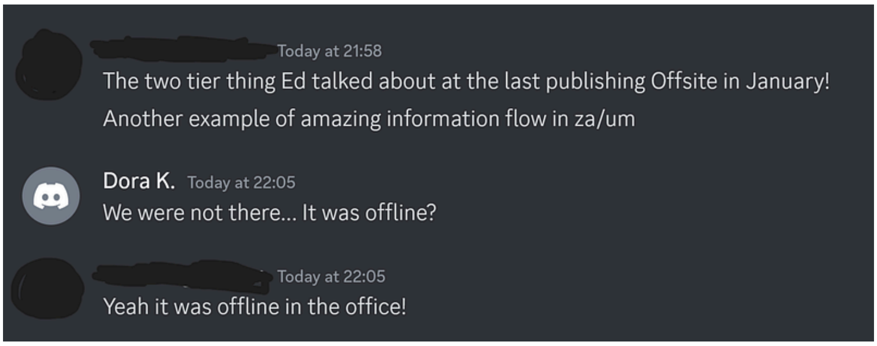
❤️ 1

[redacted] **Michael** 7 minutes ago
Trigger warnings? I'm sorry, but this has nothing to do with PTSD. It has everything to do with the fact that in the last week there has been more open discussion on this Slack of layoffs at other companies than there has about this company putting a quarter of its employees up for redundancy, and offering them a single month of severance pay.

[redacted] **Michael** 2 minutes ago
Obviously it's an upsetting situation for all involved – it would be less upsetting were we not being sent off into a decimated job market with a pittance.

☝️ 2

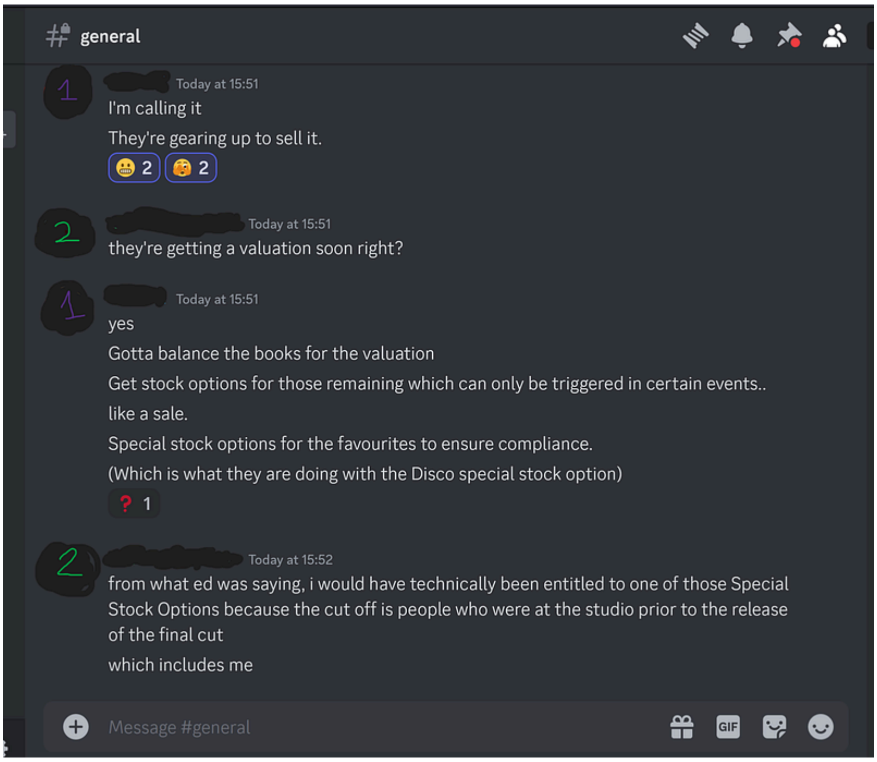
Here's information and discussion about the "privileged" ZA/UM shares which were secretly offered to all the Leads and Directors to buy their consensus just before the redundancy procedure was announced:



[redacted] [redacted] Today at 21:58
The two tier thing Ed talked about at the last publishing Offsite in January!
Another example of amazing information flow in za/um

Dora K. Today at 22:05
We were not there... It was offline?

[redacted] [redacted] Today at 22:05
Yeah it was offline in the office!



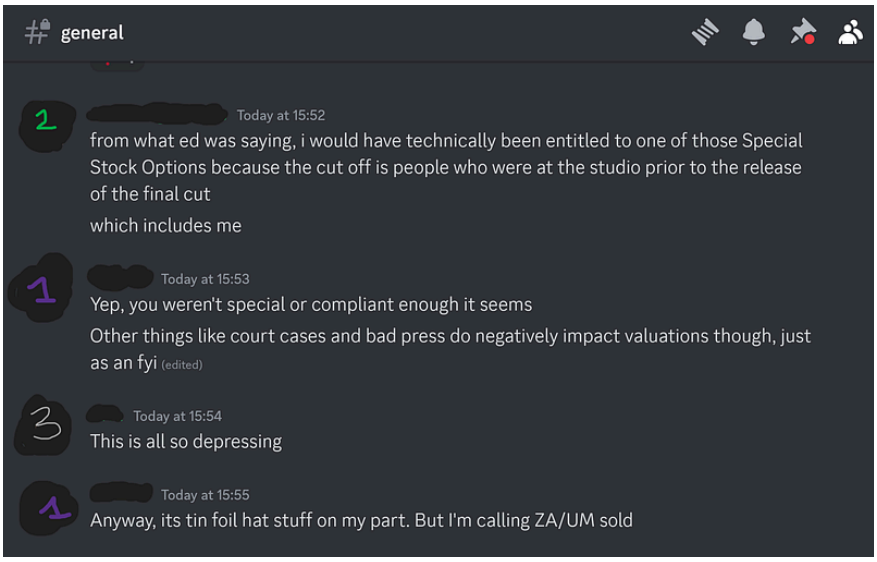
[redacted] 1 [redacted] Today at 15:51
I'm calling it
They're gearing up to sell it.
😬 2 🫢 2

[redacted] 2 [redacted] Today at 15:51
they're getting a valuation soon right?

[redacted] 1 [redacted] Today at 15:51
yes
Gotta balance the books for the valuation
Get stock options for those remaining which can only be triggered in certain events..
like a sale.
Special stock options for the favourites to ensure compliance.
(Which is what they are doing with the Disco special stock option)
❓ 1

[redacted] 2 [redacted] Today at 15:52
from what ed was saying, i would have technically been entitled to one of those Special Stock Options because the cut off is people who were at the studio prior to the release of the final cut
which includes me

23rd February 2024

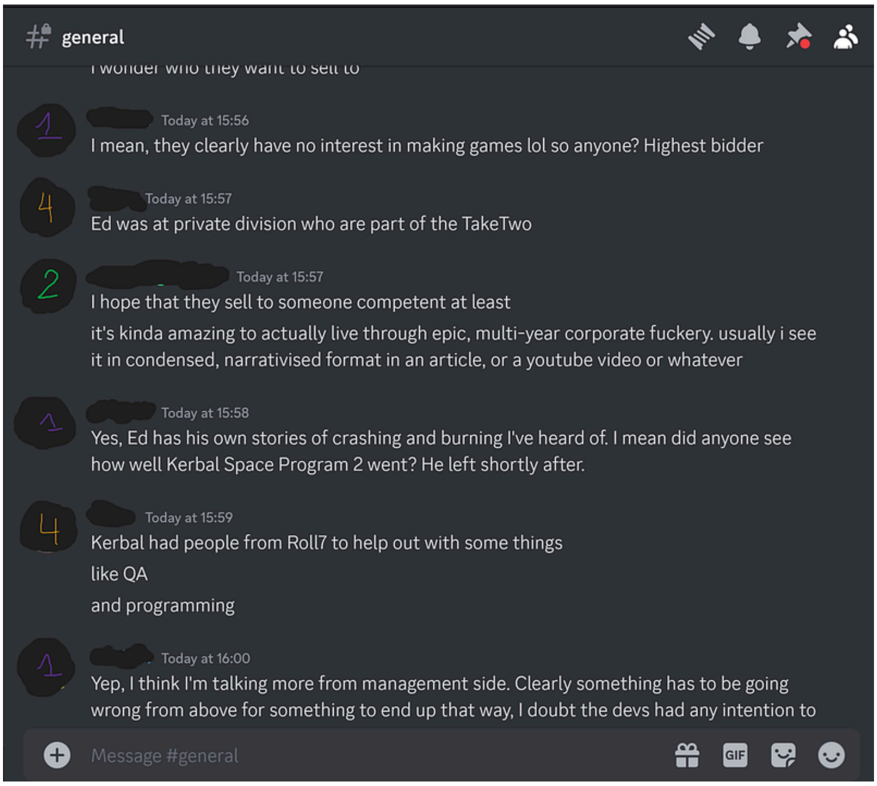


[redacted] 2 [redacted] Today at 15:52
from what ed was saying, i would have technically been entitled to one of those Special Stock Options because the cut off is people who were at the studio prior to the release of the final cut
which includes me

[redacted] 1 [redacted] Today at 15:53
Yep, you weren't special or compliant enough it seems
Other things like court cases and bad press do negatively impact valuations though, just as an fyi (edited)

[redacted] 3 [redacted] Today at 15:54
This is all so depressing

[redacted] 1 [redacted] Today at 15:55
Anyway, its tin foil hat stuff on my part. But I'm calling ZA/UM sold



I wonder who they want to sell to

1 [redacted] Today at 15:56
I mean, they clearly have no interest in making games lol so anyone? Highest bidder

4 [redacted] Today at 15:57
Ed was at private division who are part of the TakeTwo

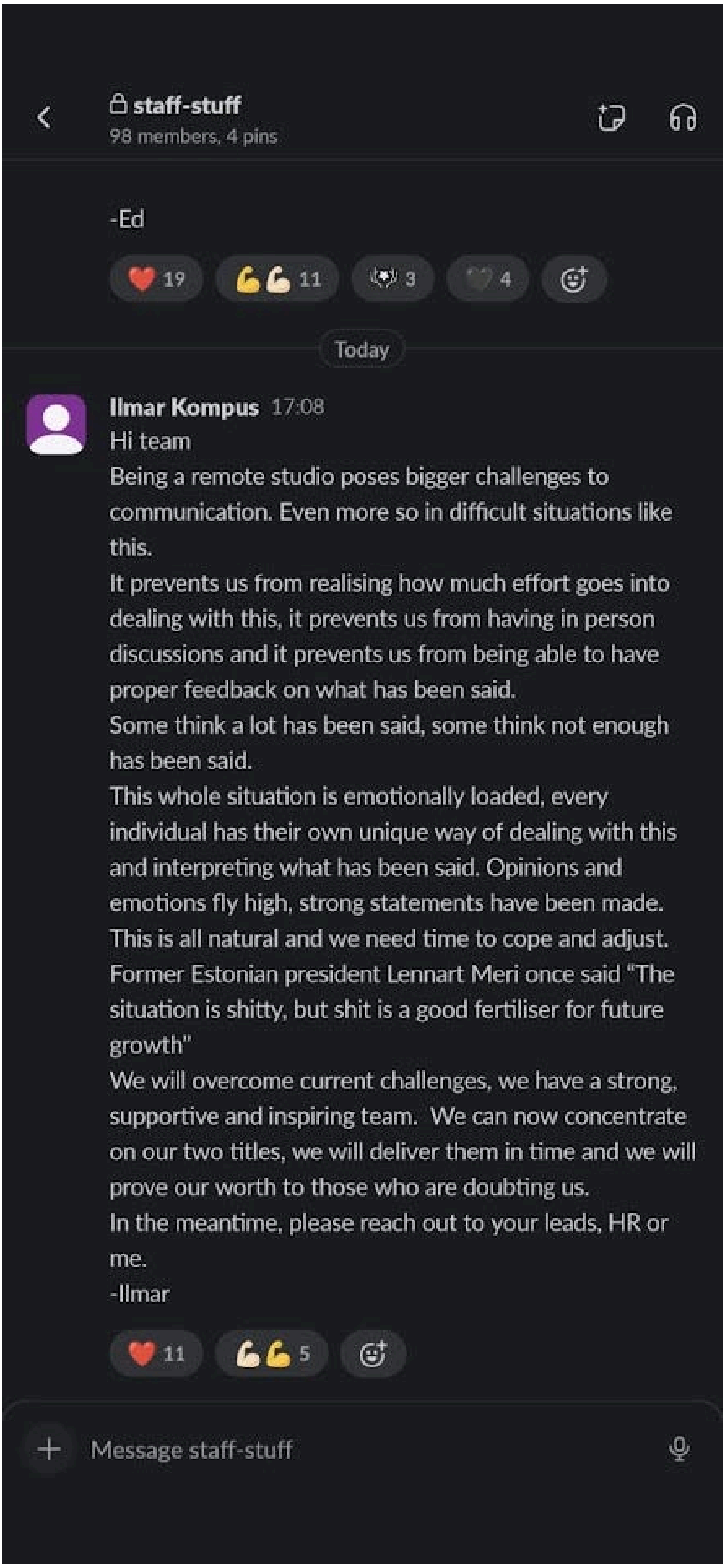
2 [redacted] Today at 15:57
I hope that they sell to someone competent at least
it's kinda amazing to actually live through epic, multi-year corporate fuckery. usually i see it in condensed, narrativised format in an article, or a youtube video or whatever

1 [redacted] Today at 15:58
Yes, Ed has his own stories of crashing and burning I've heard of. I mean did anyone see how well Kerbal Space Program 2 went? He left shortly after.

4 [redacted] Today at 15:59
Kerbal had people from Roll7 to help out with some things
like QA
and programming

1 [redacted] Today at 16:00
Yep, I think I'm talking more from management side. Clearly something has to be going wrong from above for something to end up that way, I doubt the devs had any intention to

And how sensitive were ZA/UM management about the rushed and dubious redundancy process they were putting people through, you ask? Here’s Ilmar clumsily referring to people being made redundant as “shit” as part of some insane Estonian parable:



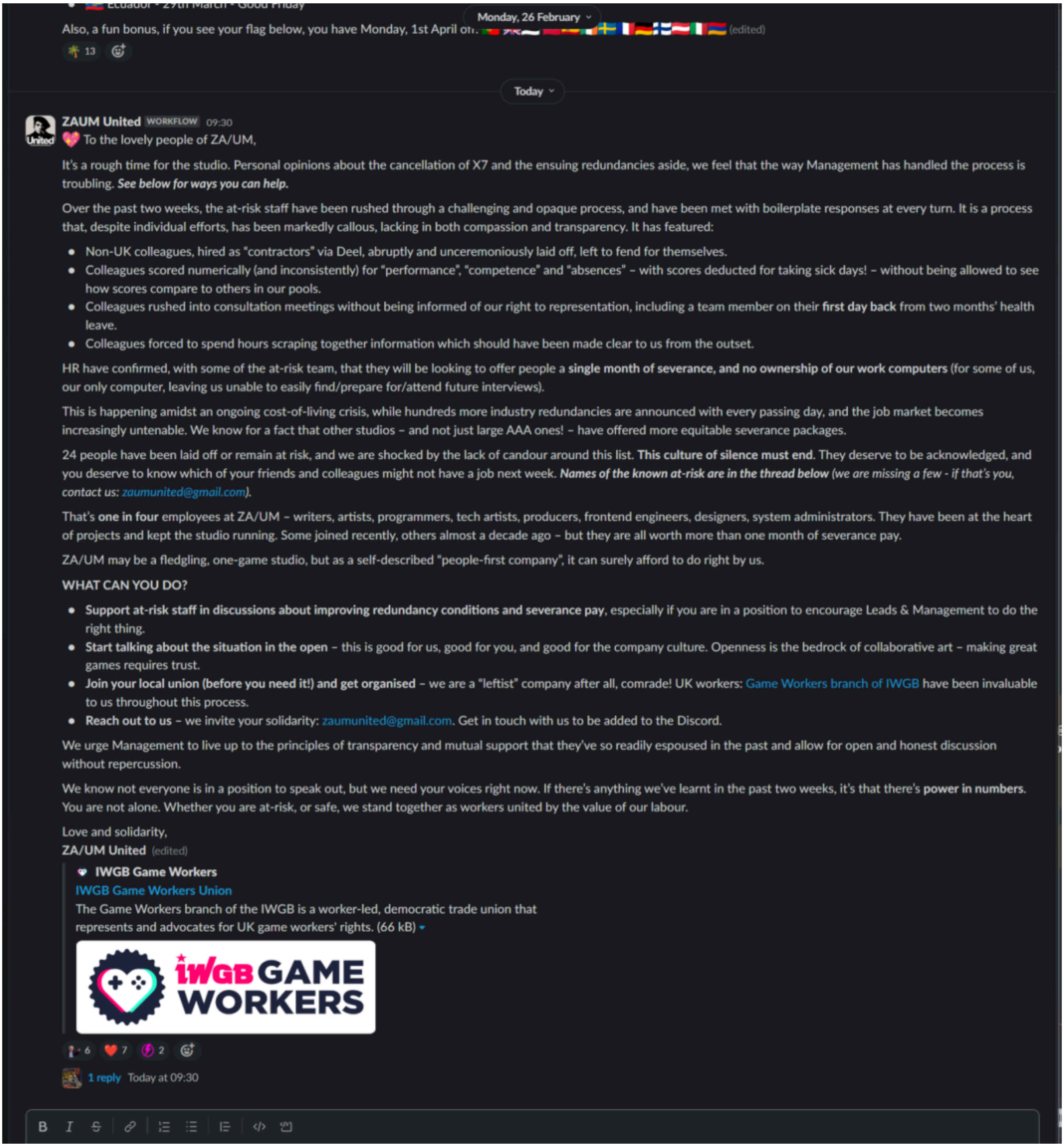
-Ed

Ilmar Kompus 17:08
Hi team
Being a remote studio poses bigger challenges to communication. Even more so in difficult situations like this.
It prevents us from realising how much effort goes into dealing with this, it prevents us from having in person discussions and it prevents us from being able to have proper feedback on what has been said.
Some think a lot has been said, some think not enough has been said.
This whole situation is emotionally loaded, every individual has their own unique way of dealing with this and interpreting what has been said. Opinions and emotions fly high, strong statements have been made.
This is all natural and we need time to cope and adjust.
Former Estonian president Lennart Meri once said “The situation is shitty, but shit is a good fertiliser for future growth"
We will overcome current challenges, we have a strong, supportive and inspiring team. We can now concentrate on our two titles, we will deliver them in time and we will prove our worth to those who are doubting us.
In the meantime, please reach out to your leads, HR or me.
-Ilmar

21st February 2024

Numerous junior employees who testified affirmatively about the abuses and workplace issues at ZA/UM were also placed on the redundancy list—as well as known union members, members of the diversity committee, and disproportionately employees of colour and women. They were not informed of their rights. The IWGB tried to argue for a better and fairer redundancy process for everyone, and we tried to put pressure on management through the union and through the press. Most of the heavy lifting was done by some extraordinarily brave people from the redundancy pool. An incredible front was put up against Ilmar by the grassroots union, ZA/UM United—I wish their story would be told, too. Argo and I forfeited any redundancy, severance or notice pay, because we spoke to the press and constructively resigned from this charade—the most expensive interview I ever gave, and I don't regret a penny.

Here's the glorious journey of ZA/UM United, starting first with a post from an untraceable rogue Slack automation bot which sent ZA/UM management into total crisis management mode:



- Ecuador - 29th March - Good Friday

Monday, 26 February

Also, a fun bonus, if you see your flag below, you have Monday, 1st April on: (edited)

13

Today

ZAUM United WORKFLOW 09:30

💖 To the lovely people of ZA/UM,

It's a rough time for the studio. Personal opinions about the cancellation of X7 and the ensuing redundancies aside, we feel that the way Management has handled the process is troubling. ***See below for ways you can help.***

Over the past two weeks, the at-risk staff have been rushed through a challenging and opaque process, and have been met with boilerplate responses at every turn. It is a process that, despite individual efforts, has been markedly callous, lacking in both compassion and transparency. It has featured:

- Non-UK colleagues, hired as "contractors" via Deel, abruptly and unceremoniously laid off, left to fend for themselves.
- Colleagues scored numerically (and inconsistently) for "performance", "competence" and "absences" – with scores deducted for taking sick days! – without being allowed to see how scores compare to others in our pools.
- Colleagues rushed into consultation meetings without being informed of our right to representation, including a team member on their **first day back** from two months' health leave.
- Colleagues forced to spend hours scraping together information which should have been made clear to us from the outset.

HR have confirmed, with some of the at-risk team, that they will be looking to offer people a **single month of severance, and no ownership of our work computers** (for some of us, our only computer, leaving us unable to easily find/prepare for/attend future interviews).

This is happening amidst an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, while hundreds more industry redundancies are announced with every passing day, and the job market becomes increasingly untenable. We know for a fact that other studios – and not just large AAA ones! – have offered more equitable severance packages.

24 people have been laid off or remain at risk, and we are shocked by the lack of candour around this list. **This culture of silence must end**. They deserve to be acknowledged, and you deserve to know which of your friends and colleagues might not have a job next week. ***Names of the known at-risk are in the thread below*** *(we are missing a few - if that's you, contact us: zaumunited@gmail.com).*

That's **one in four** employees at ZA/UM – writers, artists, programmers, tech artists, producers, frontend engineers, designers, system administrators. They have been at the heart of projects and kept the studio running. Some joined recently, others almost a decade ago – but they are all worth more than one month of severance pay.

ZA/UM may be a fledgling, one-game studio, but as a self-described "people-first company", it can surely afford to do right by us.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Support at-risk staff in discussions about improving redundancy conditions and severance pay**, especially if you are in a position to encourage Leads & Management to do the right thing.
- **Start talking about the situation in the open** – this is good for us, good for you, and good for the company culture. Openness is the bedrock of collaborative art – making great games requires trust.
- **Join your local union (before you need it!) and get organised** – we are a "leftist" company after all, comrade! UK workers: Game Workers branch of IWGB have been invaluable to us throughout this process.
- **Reach out to us** – we invite your solidarity: zaumunited@gmail.com. Get in touch with us to be added to the Discord.

We urge Management to live up to the principles of transparency and mutual support that they've so readily espoused in the past and allow for open and honest discussion without repercussion.

We know not everyone is in a position to speak out, but we need your voices right now. If there's anything we've learnt in the past two weeks, it's that there's **power in numbers**. You are not alone. Whether you are at-risk, or safe, we stand together as workers united by the value of our labour.

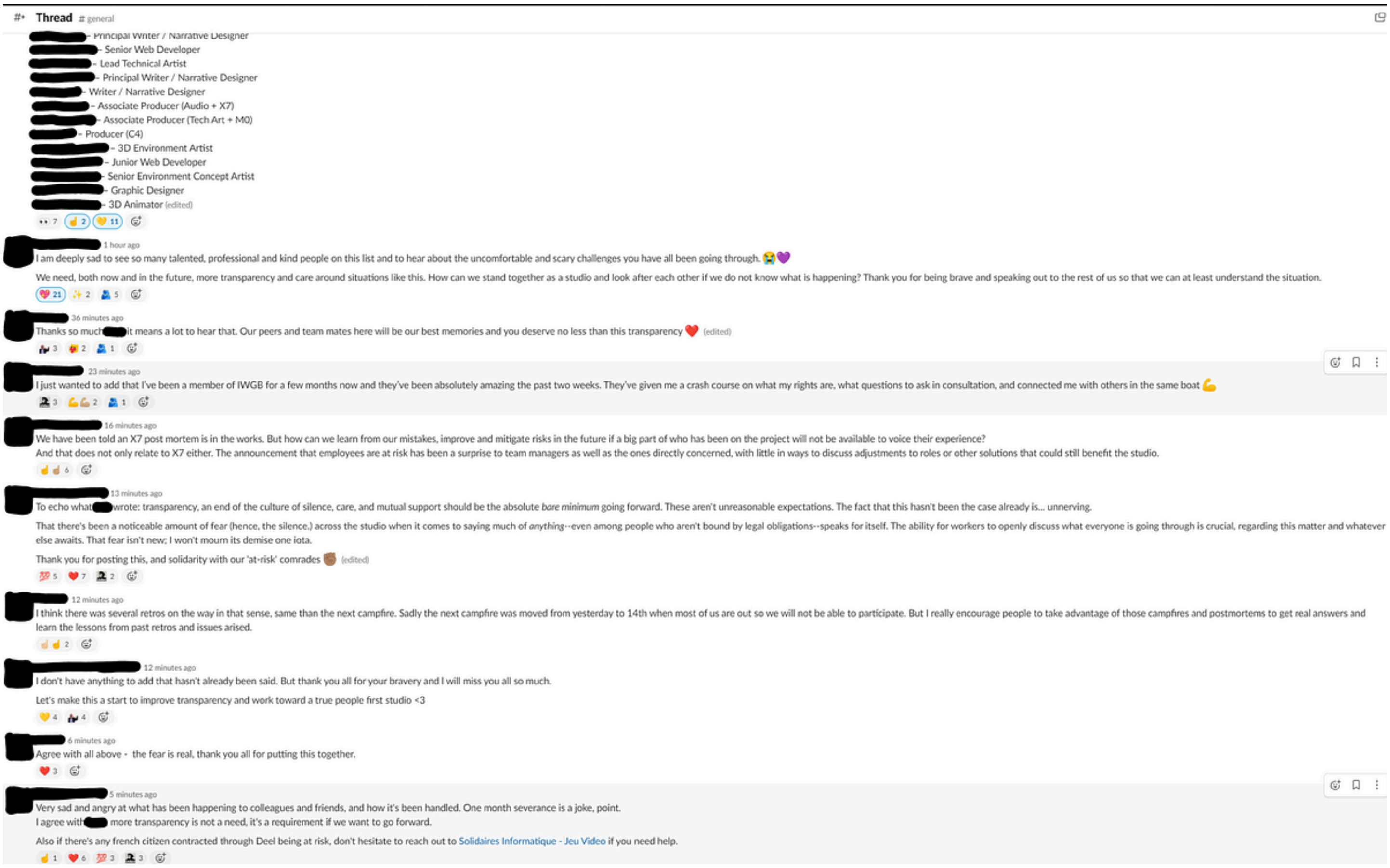
Love and solidarity,
ZA/UM United (edited)

IWGB Game Workers
IWGB Game Workers Union
The Game Workers branch of the IWGB is a worker-led, democratic trade union that represents and advocates for UK game workers' rights. (66 kB)

6 7 2

1 reply Today at 09:30

1st March 2024



[redacted]- Principal Writer / Narrative Designer
[redacted]- Senior Web Developer
[redacted]- Lead Technical Artist
[redacted]- Principal Writer / Narrative Designer
[redacted]- Writer / Narrative Designer
[redacted]- Associate Producer (Audio + X7)
[redacted]- Associate Producer (Tech Art + M0)
[redacted]- Producer (C4)
[redacted]- 3D Environment Artist
[redacted]- Junior Web Developer
[redacted]- Senior Environment Concept Artist
[redacted]- Graphic Designer
[redacted]- 3D Animator (edited)

👀 7 ☝ 2 💛 11

[redacted] 1 hour ago
I am deeply sad to see so many talented, professional and kind people on this list and to hear about the uncomfortable and scary challenges you have all been going through. 😭💜

We need, both now and in the future, more transparency and care around situations like this. How can we stand together as a studio and look after each other if we do not know what is happening? Thank you for being brave and speaking out to the rest of us so that we can at least understand the situation.

💖 21 ✨ 2 🫂 5

[redacted] 36 minutes ago
Thanks so much [redacted] it means a lot to hear that. Our peers and team mates here will be our best memories and you deserve no less than this transparency ❤️ (edited)

3 2 🫂 1

[redacted] 23 minutes ago
I just wanted to add that I've been a member of IWGB for a few months now and they've been absolutely amazing the past two weeks. They've given me a crash course on what my rights are, what questions to ask in consultation, and connected me with others in the same boat 💪

3 💪💪 2 🫂 1

[redacted] 16 minutes ago
We have been told an X7 post mortem is in the works. But how can we learn from our mistakes, improve and mitigate risks in the future if a big part of who has been on the project will not be available to voice their experience?
And that does not only relate to X7 either. The announcement that employees are at risk has been a surprise to team managers as well as the ones directly concerned, with little in ways to discuss adjustments to roles or other solutions that could still benefit the studio.

☝☝ 6

[redacted] 13 minutes ago
To echo what [redacted] wrote: transparency, an end of the culture of silence, care, and mutual support should be the absolute *bare minimum* going forward. These aren't unreasonable expectations. The fact that this hasn't been the case already is... unnerving.

That there's been a noticeable amount of fear (hence, the silence.) across the studio when it comes to saying much of *anything*--even among people who aren't bound by legal obligations--speaks for itself. The ability for workers to openly discuss what everyone is going through is crucial, regarding this matter and whatever else awaits. That fear isn't new; I won't mourn its demise one iota.

Thank you for posting this, and solidarity with our 'at-risk' comrades ✊ (edited)

💯 5 ❤️ 7 2

[redacted] 12 minutes ago
I think there was several retros on the way in that sense, same than the next campfire. Sadly the next campfire was moved from yesterday to 14th when most of us are out so we will not be able to participate. But I really encourage people to take advantage of those campfires and postmortems to get real answers and learn the lessons from past retros and issues arised.

☝☝ 2

[redacted] 12 minutes ago
I don't have anything to add that hasn't already been said. But thank you all for your bravery and I will miss you all so much.

Let's make this a start to improve transparency and work toward a true people first studio <3

💛 4 4

[redacted] 6 minutes ago
Agree with all above - the fear is real, thank you all for putting this together.

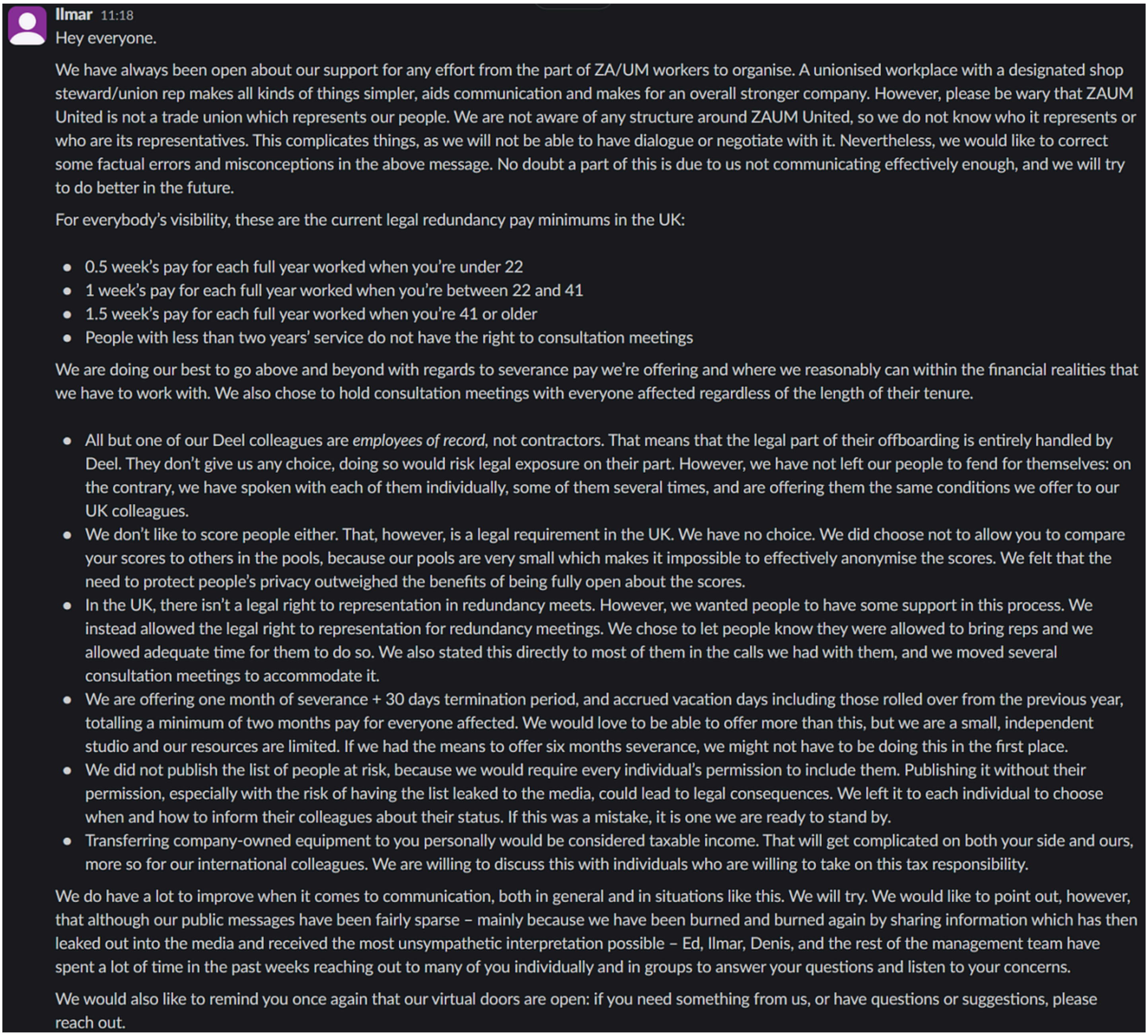
❤️ 3

[redacted] 5 minutes ago
Very sad and angry at what has been happening to colleagues and friends, and how it's been handled. One month severance is a joke, point.
I agree with [redacted] more transparency is not a need, it's a requirement if we want to go forward.

Also if there's any french citizen contracted through Deel being at risk, don't hesitate to reach out to Solidaires Informatique - Jeu Video if you need help.

☝ 1 ❤️ 6 💯 3 3

Outpouring of love for ZA/UM United



Ilmar 11:18

Hey everyone.

We have always been open about our support for any effort from the part of ZA/UM workers to organise. A unionised workplace with a designated shop steward/union rep makes all kinds of things simpler, aids communication and makes for an overall stronger company. However, please be wary that ZAUM United is not a trade union which represents our people. We are not aware of any structure around ZAUM United, so we do not know who it represents or who are its representatives. This complicates things, as we will not be able to have dialogue or negotiate with it. Nevertheless, we would like to correct some factual errors and misconceptions in the above message. No doubt a part of this is due to us not communicating effectively enough, and we will try to do better in the future.

For everybody's visibility, these are the current legal redundancy pay minimums in the UK:

- 0.5 week's pay for each full year worked when you're under 22
- 1 week's pay for each full year worked when you're between 22 and 41
- 1.5 week's pay for each full year worked when you're 41 or older
- People with less than two years' service do not have the right to consultation meetings

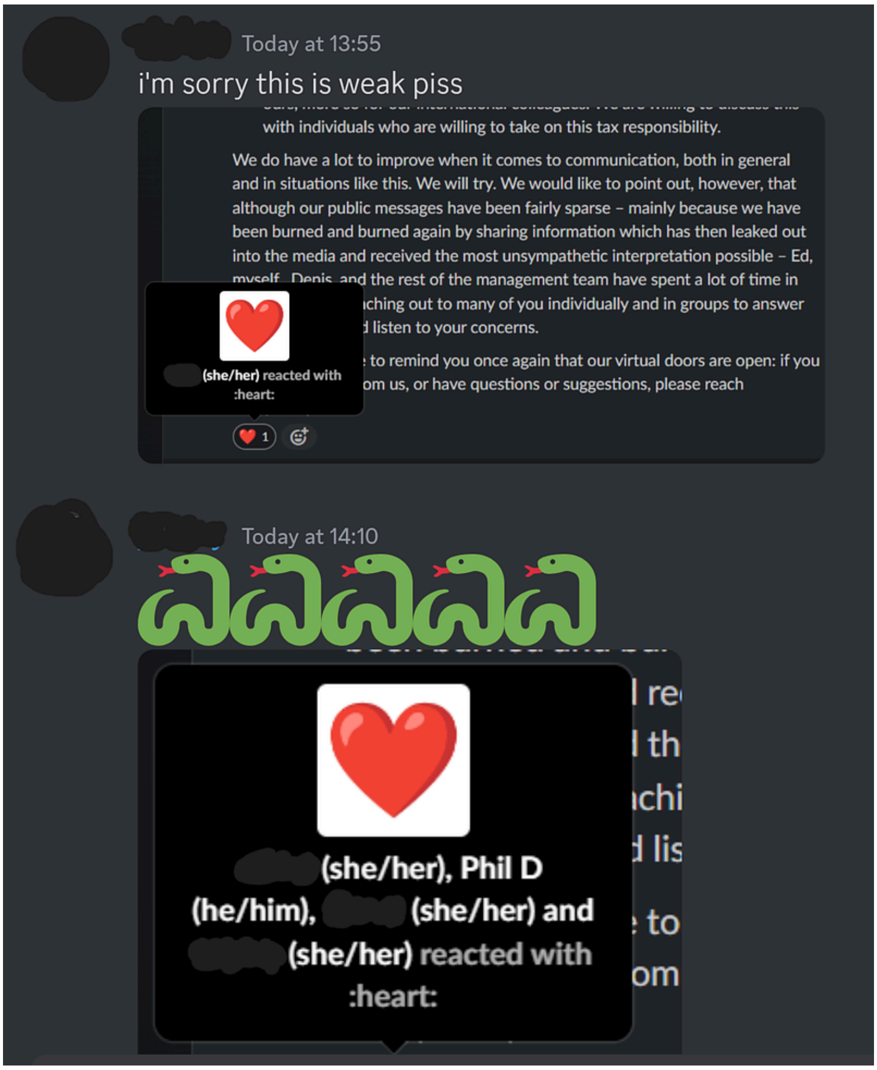
We are doing our best to go above and beyond with regards to severance pay we're offering and where we reasonably can within the financial realities that we have to work with. We also chose to hold consultation meetings with everyone affected regardless of the length of their tenure.

- All but one of our Deel colleagues are *employees of record*, not contractors. That means that the legal part of their offboarding is entirely handled by Deel. They don't give us any choice, doing so would risk legal exposure on their part. However, we have not left our people to fend for themselves: on the contrary, we have spoken with each of them individually, some of them several times, and are offering them the same conditions we offer to our UK colleagues.
- We don't like to score people either. That, however, is a legal requirement in the UK. We have no choice. We did choose not to allow you to compare your scores to others in the pools, because our pools are very small which makes it impossible to effectively anonymise the scores. We felt that the need to protect people's privacy outweighed the benefits of being fully open about the scores.
- In the UK, there isn't a legal right to representation in redundancy meets. However, we wanted people to have some support in this process. We instead allowed the legal right to representation for redundancy meetings. We chose to let people know they were allowed to bring reps and we allowed adequate time for them to do so. We also stated this directly to most of them in the calls we had with them, and we moved several consultation meetings to accommodate it.
- We are offering one month of severance + 30 days termination period, and accrued vacation days including those rolled over from the previous year, totalling a minimum of two months pay for everyone affected. We would love to be able to offer more than this, but we are a small, independent studio and our resources are limited. If we had the means to offer six months severance, we might not have to be doing this in the first place.
- We did not publish the list of people at risk, because we would require every individual's permission to include them. Publishing it without their permission, especially with the risk of having the list leaked to the media, could lead to legal consequences. We left it to each individual to choose when and how to inform their colleagues about their status. If this was a mistake, it is one we are ready to stand by.
- Transferring company-owned equipment to you personally would be considered taxable income. That will get complicated on both your side and ours, more so for our international colleagues. We are willing to discuss this with individuals who are willing to take on this tax responsibility.

We do have a lot to improve when it comes to communication, both in general and in situations like this. We will try. We would like to point out, however, that although our public messages have been fairly sparse – mainly because we have been burned and burned again by sharing information which has then leaked out into the media and received the most unsympathetic interpretation possible – Ed, Ilmar, Denis, and the rest of the management team have spent a lot of time in the past weeks reaching out to many of you individually and in groups to answer your questions and listen to your concerns.

We would also like to remind you once again that our virtual doors are open: if you need something from us, or have questions or suggestions, please reach out.

1st March 2024 — Ilmar's response to ZA/UM United



[redacted] Today at 13:55

i'm sorry this is weak piss

with individuals who are willing to take on this tax responsibility.

We do have a lot to improve when it comes to communication, both in general and in situations like this. We will try. We would like to point out, however, that although our public messages have been fairly sparse – mainly because we have been burned and burned again by sharing information which has then leaked out into the media and received the most unsympathetic interpretation possible – Ed, myself, Denis, and the rest of the management team have spent a lot of time in

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d listen to your concerns.

to remind you once again that our virtual doors are open: if you

om us, or have questions or suggestions, please reach

[redacted] (she/her) reacted with :heart:

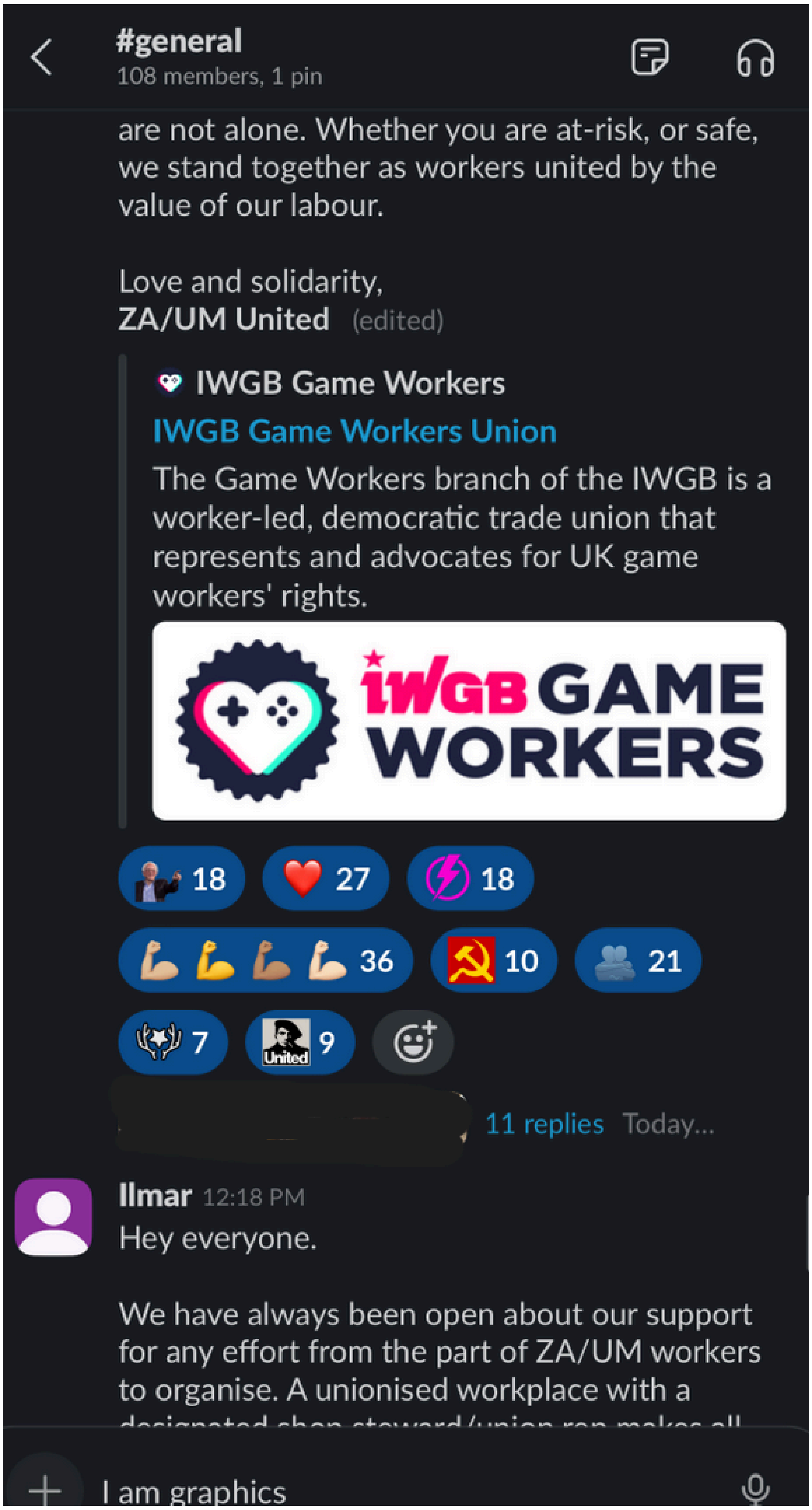
❤️ 1

[redacted] Today at 14:10

🐍🐍🐍🐍🐍

[redacted] (she/her), Phil D (he/him), [redacted] (she/her) and [redacted] (she/her) reacted with :heart:

Level of support for Ilmar



are not alone. Whether you are at-risk, or safe, we stand together as workers united by the value of our labour.

Love and solidarity,
ZA/UM United (edited)

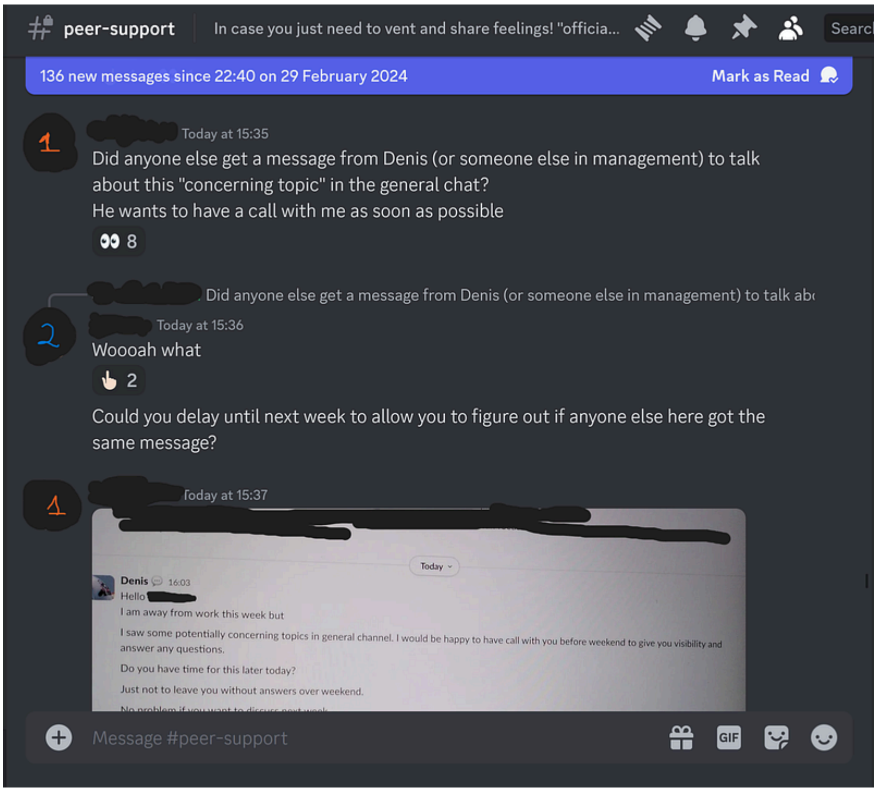
IWGB Game Workers
IWGB Game Workers Union
The Game Workers branch of the IWGB is a worker-led, democratic trade union that represents and advocates for UK game workers' rights.

[redacted] 11 replies Today...

Ilmar 12:18 PM
Hey everyone.

We have always been open about our support for any effort from the part of ZA/UM workers to organise. A unionised workplace with a designated shop steward/union rep makes all

...vs Level of support for ZA/UM united


peer-support
In case you just need to vent and share feelings! "officia...
Searc
Mark as Read

136 new messages since 22:40 on 29 February 2024

1

[redacted] Today at 15:35

Did anyone else get a message from Denis (or someone else in management) to talk about this "concerning topic" in the general chat?
He wants to have a call with me as soon as possible

👀 8

[redacted] Did anyone else get a message from Denis (or someone else in management) to talk ab

2

[redacted] Today at 15:36

Woooah what

👆 2

Could you delay until next week to allow you to figure out if anyone else here got the same message?

1

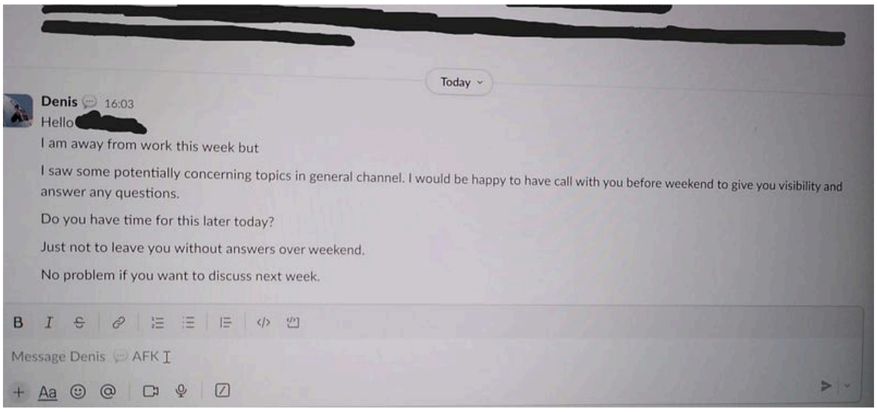
[redacted] oday at 15:37

[redacted]

Today

Denis 16:03
Hello [redacted]
I am away from work this week but
I saw some potentially concerning topics in general channel. I would be happy to have call with you before weekend to give you visibility and answer any questions.
Do you have time for this later today?
Just not to leave you without answers over weekend.

Union busting starts

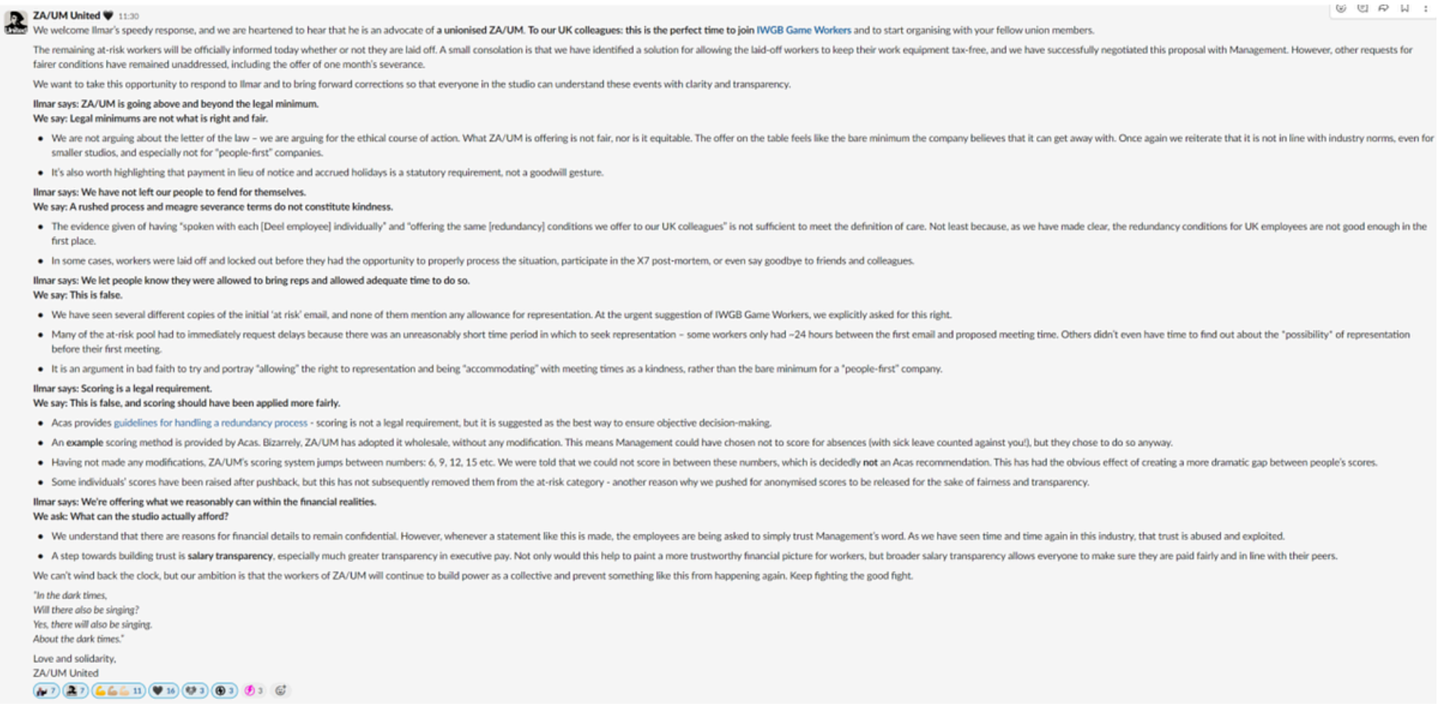


[redacted]

Today

Denis 16:03
Hello [redacted]
I am away from work this week but
I saw some potentially concerning topics in general channel. I would be happy to have call with you before weekend to give you visibility and answer any questions.
Do you have time for this later today?
Just not to leave you without answers over weekend.
No problem if you want to discuss next week.

"Concerning"



ZA/UM United 🖤 11:30

We welcome Ilmar’s speedy response, and we are heartened to hear that he is an advocate of **a unionised ZA/UM. To our UK colleagues: this is the perfect time to join** IWGB Game Workers and to start organising with your fellow union members.

The remaining at-risk workers will be officially informed today whether or not they are laid off. A small consolation is that we have identified a solution for allowing the laid-off workers to keep their work equipment tax-free, and we have successfully negotiated this proposal with Management. However, other requests for fairer conditions have remained unaddressed, including the offer of one month’s severance.

We want to take this opportunity to respond to Ilmar and to bring forward corrections so that everyone in the studio can understand these events with clarity and transparency.

Ilmar says: ZA/UM is going above and beyond the legal minimum.
We say: Legal minimums are not what is right and fair.

- We are not arguing about the letter of the law – we are arguing for the ethical course of action. What ZA/UM is offering is not fair, nor is it equitable. The offer on the table feels like the bare minimum the company believes that it can get away with. Once again we reiterate that it is not in line with industry norms, even for smaller studios, and especially not for “people-first” companies.
- It’s also worth highlighting that payment in lieu of notice and accrued holidays is a statutory requirement, not a goodwill gesture.

Ilmar says: We have not left our people to fend for themselves.
We say: A rushed process and meagre severance terms do not constitute kindness.

- The evidence given of having “spoken with each [Deel employee] individually” and “offering the same [redundancy] conditions we offer to our UK colleagues” is not sufficient to meet the definition of care. Not least because, as we have made clear, the redundancy conditions for UK employees are not good enough in the first place.
- In some cases, workers were laid off and locked out before they had the opportunity to properly process the situation, participate in the X7 post-mortem, or even say goodbye to friends and colleagues.

Ilmar says: We let people know they were allowed to bring reps and allowed adequate time to do so.
We say: This is false.

- We have seen several different copies of the initial ‘at risk’ email, and none of them mention any allowance for representation. At the urgent suggestion of IWGB Game Workers, we explicitly asked for this right.
- Many of the at-risk pool had to immediately request delays because there was an unreasonably short time period in which to seek representation – some workers only had ~24 hours between the first email and proposed meeting time. Others didn’t even have time to find out about the “possibility” of representation before their first meeting.
- It is an argument in bad faith to try and portray “allowing” the right to representation and being “accommodating” with meeting times as a kindness, rather than the bare minimum for a “people-first” company.

Ilmar says: Scoring is a legal requirement.
We say: This is false, and scoring should have been applied more fairly.

- Acas provides guidelines for handling a redundancy process - scoring is not a legal requirement, but it is suggested as the best way to ensure objective decision-making.
- An **example** scoring method is provided by Acas. Bizarrely, ZA/UM has adopted it wholesale, without any modification. This means Management could have chosen not to score for absences (with sick leave counted against you!), but they chose to do so anyway.
- Having not made any modifications, ZA/UM’s scoring system jumps between numbers: 6, 9, 12, 15 etc. We were told that we could not score in between these numbers, which is decidedly **not** an Acas recommendation. This has had the obvious effect of creating a more dramatic gap between people’s scores.
- Some individuals’ scores have been raised after pushback, but this has not subsequently removed them from the at-risk category - another reason why we pushed for anonymised scores to be released for the sake of fairness and transparency.

Ilmar says: We’re offering what we reasonably can within the financial realities.
We ask: What can the studio actually afford?

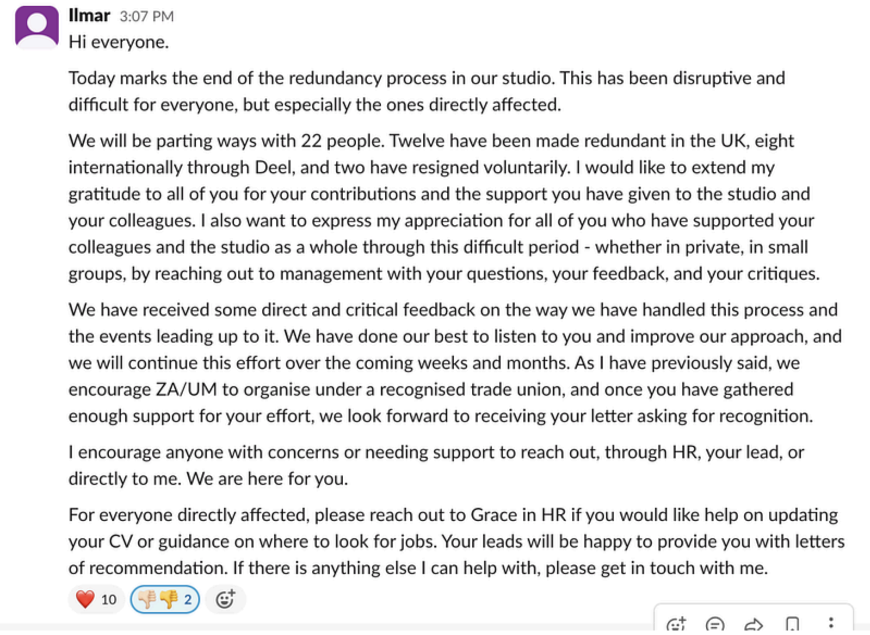
- We understand that there are reasons for financial details to remain confidential. However, whenever a statement like this is made, the employees are being asked to simply trust Management’s word. As we have seen time and time again in this industry, that trust is abused and exploited.
- A step towards building trust is **salary transparency**, especially much greater transparency in executive pay. Not only would this help to paint a more trustworthy financial picture for workers, but broader salary transparency allows everyone to make sure they are paid fairly and in line with their peers.

We can’t wind back the clock, but our ambition is that the workers of ZA/UM will continue to build power as a collective and prevent something like this from happening again. Keep fighting the good fight.

“In the dark times,
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.”

Love and solidarity,
ZA/UM United

8th March 2024 — Final message from ZA/UM United



Ilmar 3:07 PM

Hi everyone.

Today marks the end of the redundancy process in our studio. This has been disruptive and difficult for everyone, but especially the ones directly affected.

We will be parting ways with 22 people. Twelve have been made redundant in the UK, eight internationally through Deel, and two have resigned voluntarily. I would like to extend my gratitude to all of you for your contributions and the support you have given to the studio and your colleagues. I also want to express my appreciation for all of you who have supported your colleagues and the studio as a whole through this difficult period - whether in private, in small groups, by reaching out to management with your questions, your feedback, and your critiques.

We have received some direct and critical feedback on the way we have handled this process and the events leading up to it. We have done our best to listen to you and improve our approach, and we will continue this effort over the coming weeks and months. As I have previously said, we encourage ZA/UM to organise under a recognised trade union, and once you have gathered enough support for your effort, we look forward to receiving your letter asking for recognition.

I encourage anyone with concerns or needing support to reach out, through HR, your lead, or directly to me. We are here for you.

For everyone directly affected, please reach out to Grace in HR if you would like help on updating your CV or guidance on where to look for jobs. Your leads will be happy to provide you with letters of recommendation. If there is anything else I can help with, please get in touch with me.

8th March 2024 — Ilmar concludes redundancy process

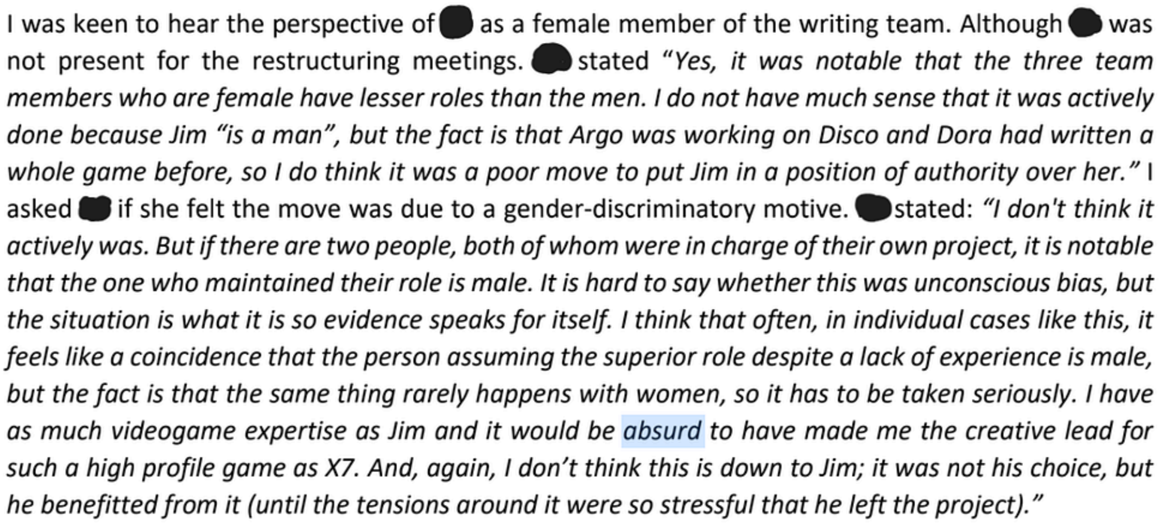
The “voluntarily” part above is intentional misrepresentation — I had by then announced I considered myself *constructively dismissed*, which in British legal terms implies that ZA/UM had so consistently breached our contract and put my health and safety in danger for so long that it was no longer possible to do my work. This had already been the case for months.

At that point, I had been discussing with a legal team and was gearing up to sue ZA/UM, and the funny thing is that it was Kaur Kender who advised me not to do it. He said the cost of finances, emotions, reputation and time is enormous even in the best of cases. But more importantly, he said if you try to accuse Tõnis and Ilmar of anything, they will say that *you* were the problem, that *you* had issues with people, they will mobilize their subordinates against you, and then put you in a position where you will have to defend your character to discourage you from pursuing your claims and distract from the topic at hand. He ended with, I quote: **“I know this because that’s what I would do, too.”**

And they *have* done it before together, haven’t they? I’m sure I don’t need to point out history repeating itself, already as farce.

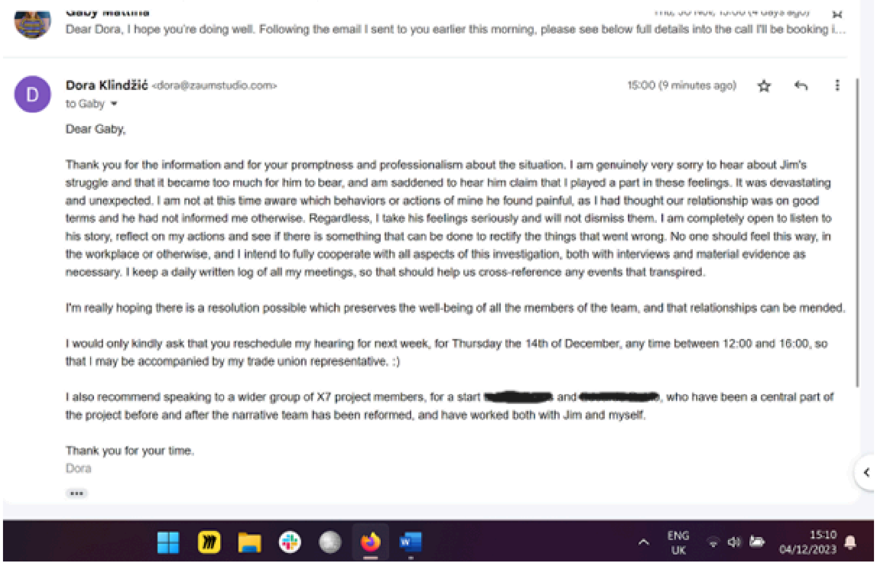
If it bears saying anything to disprove the completely baseless allegations ZA/UM presented against me in the People Make Games video, I never used the word “shit” or derogatory language to give feedback at work, this is simply not true and I have not seen evidence to the contrary. Giving feedback to peers and juniors was an incredibly sensitive process and I have evidence of people having positive experiences with my guidance, shown below. All of my interactions with Jim and others in the final 5–7 months of the project were recorded via dictaphone and it can be verified that we were amicable. In fact, I would say that it is the **opposite** of what ZA/UM claims happened, as **our last interaction was one where I cried confessing to Jim how badly I felt bullied by Tõnis and how hurt I felt that he didn’t defend me from it as team lead, director and older man.** I had never cried in a work meeting before in my entire life, but two years of insane corporate gaslighting at ZA/UM had worn me down. Jim apologized to me for going through it, seemed uncomfortable, then disappeared from work for weeks and ultimately resigned and never spoke to me again. Once more, I have evidence of this in the form of audio recordings, clear as day. Is this not critical context that is being left out of the narrative?

By the way, the only other female member of the team who was asked for her opinion in the gender discrimination investigation stated that the arrangement surrounding my position on the project in favour of Jim was “**absurd**”. After this investigation into gender discrimination in the studio, every single female member of the team was laid off.



I was keen to hear the perspective of [redacted] as a female member of the writing team. Although [redacted] was not present for the restructuring meetings. [redacted] stated *"Yes, it was notable that the three team members who are female have lesser roles than the men. I do not have much sense that it was actively done because Jim "is a man", but the fact is that Argo was working on Disco and Dora had written a whole game before, so I do think it was a poor move to put Jim in a position of authority over her."* I asked [redacted] if she felt the move was due to a gender-discriminatory motive. [redacted] stated: *"I don't think it actively was. But if there are two people, both of whom were in charge of their own project, it is notable that the one who maintained their role is male. It is hard to say whether this was unconscious bias, but the situation is what it is so evidence speaks for itself. I think that often, in individual cases like this, it feels like a coincidence that the person assuming the superior role despite a lack of experience is male, but the fact is that the same thing rarely happens with women, so it has to be taken seriously. I have as much videogame expertise as Jim and it would be absurd to have made me the creative lead for such a high profile game as X7. And, again, I don't think this is down to Jim; it was not his choice, but he benefitted from it (until the tensions around it were so stressful that he left the project)."*

I wish I had been allowed to speak to Jim and I wish this and other relationships could have been mended. Instead, ZA/UM management instructed all of us to keep apart and often even enforced confidentiality by HR procedures, so that they would have an easier time controlling people's opinions. I believe this relationship was weaponized by ZA/UM from a mutually respectful and healthy relationship into one which could be used by Tõnis to drive irreconcilable rifts between what used to be friends, and was then dredged up in public by ZA/UM as a smokescreen when it was time to remove the discussion from ZA/UM's real systemic issues and failures.



Dear Dora, I hope you're doing well. Following the email I sent to you earlier this morning, please see below full details into the call I'll be booking i…

Dora Klindžić <dora@zaumstudio.com>
to Gaby
15:00 (9 minutes ago)

Dear Gaby,

Thank you for the information and for your promptness and professionalism about the situation. I am genuinely very sorry to hear about Jim's struggle and that it became too much for him to bear, and am saddened to hear him claim that I played a part in these feelings. It was devastating and unexpected. I am not at this time aware which behaviors or actions of mine he found painful, as I had thought our relationship was on good terms and he had not informed me otherwise. Regardless, I take his feelings seriously and will not dismiss them. I am completely open to listen to his story, reflect on my actions and see if there is something that can be done to rectify the things that went wrong. No one should feel this way, in the workplace or otherwise, and I intend to fully cooperate with all aspects of this investigation, both with interviews and material evidence as necessary. I keep a daily written log of all my meetings, so that should help us cross-reference any events that transpired.

I'm really hoping there is a resolution possible which preserves the well-being of all the members of the team, and that relationships can be mended.

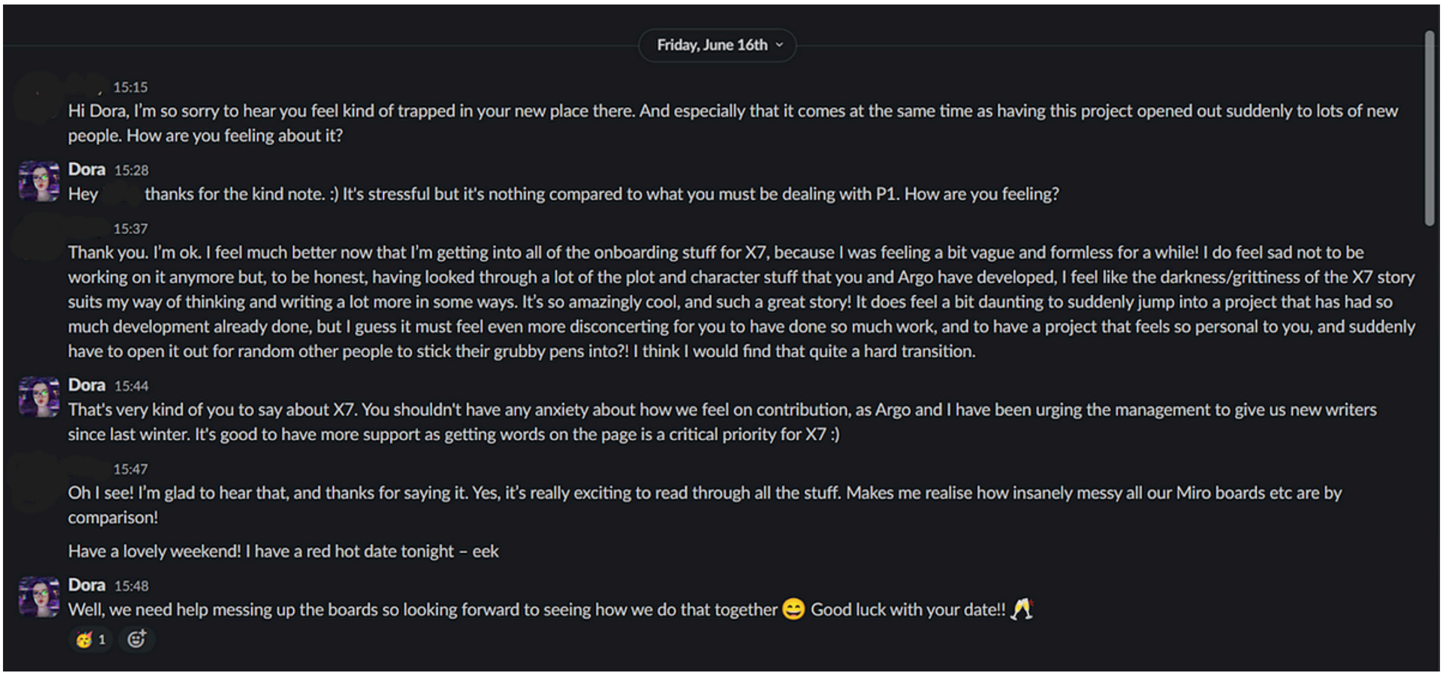
I would only kindly ask that you reschedule my hearing for next week, for Thursday the 14th of December, any time between 12:00 and 16:00, so that I may be accompanied by my trade union representative. :)

I also recommend speaking to a wider group of X7 project members, for a start [redacted] and [redacted], who have been a central part of the project before and after the narrative team has been reformed, and have worked both with Jim and myself.

Thank you for your time.
Dora

4th December 2023 — My sympathetic response to Jim resigning his role

ZA/UM claimed I was harsh or unwelcoming towards the P1 writers who newly joined the project… Here is what our relationship and communications were *actually* like, even during the days when I was suffering bullying, conflict and abuse in the meetings with Management. If you compare the date below with the dates of those HR complaints, you'll see that this was one of the most upsetting times on the project, but I gave no indication to the people who had just had their project cancelled. I regularly concealed my own mental and emotional crises for the sake of keeping the team feeling reassured.



Friday, June 16th

[redacted] 15:15
Hi Dora, I'm so sorry to hear you feel kind of trapped in your new place there. And especially that it comes at the same time as having this project opened out suddenly to lots of new people. How are you feeling about it?

Dora 15:28
Hey [redacted] thanks for the kind note. :) It's stressful but it's nothing compared to what you must be dealing with P1. How are you feeling?

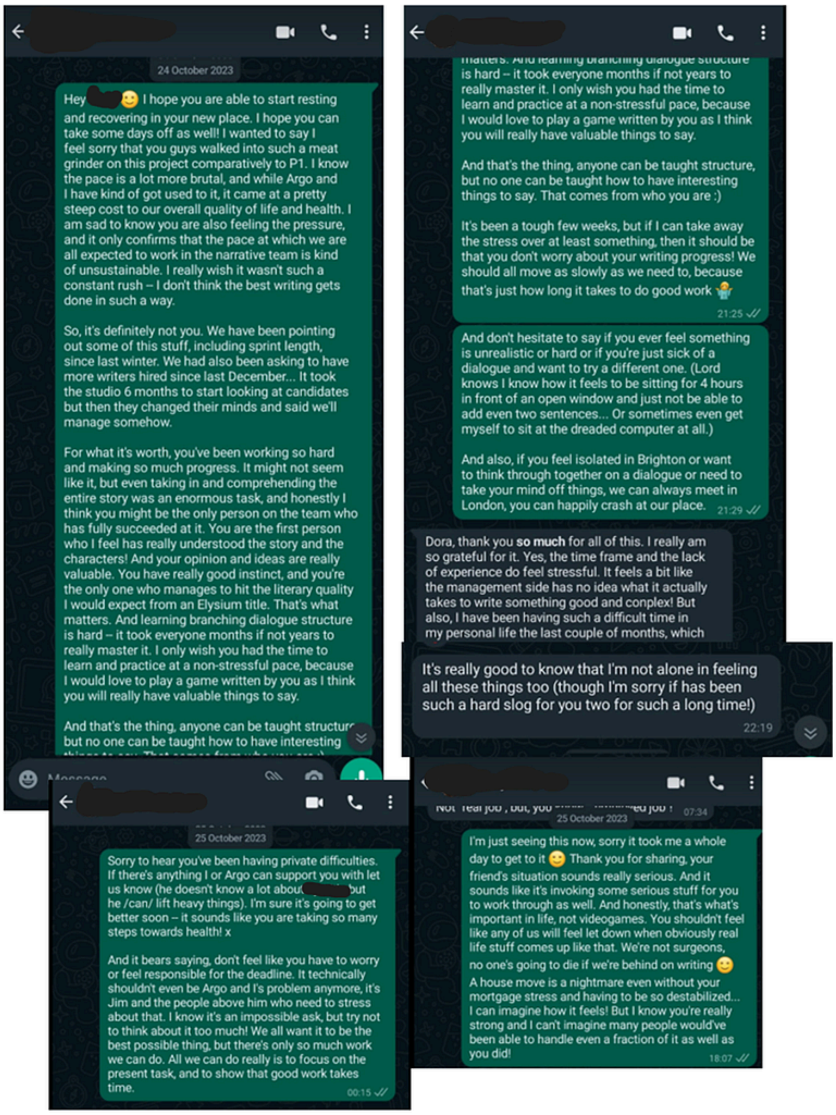
[redacted] 15:37
Thank you. I'm ok. I feel much better now that I'm getting into all of the onboarding stuff for X7, because I was feeling a bit vague and formless for a while! I do feel sad not to be working on it anymore but, to be honest, having looked through a lot of the plot and character stuff that you and Argo have developed, I feel like the darkness/grittiness of the X7 story suits my way of thinking and writing a lot more in some ways. It's so amazingly cool, and such a great story! It does feel a bit daunting to suddenly jump into a project that has had so much development already done, but I guess it must feel even more disconcerting for you to have done so much work, and to have a project that feels so personal to you, and suddenly have to open it out for random other people to stick their grubby pens into?! I think I would find that quite a hard transition.

Dora 15:44
That's very kind of you to say about X7. You shouldn't have any anxiety about how we feel on contribution, as Argo and I have been urging the management to give us new writers since last winter. It's good to have more support as getting words on the page is a critical priority for X7 :)

[redacted] 15:47
Oh I see! I'm glad to hear that, and thanks for saying it. Yes, it's really exciting to read through all the stuff. Makes me realise how insanely messy all our Miro boards etc are by comparison!

Have a lovely weekend! I have a red hot date tonight – eek

Dora 15:48
Well, we need help messing up the boards so looking forward to seeing how we do that together 😄 Good luck with your date!! 🥂
🥳 1



[redacted]

24 October 2023

Hey [redacted] 🙂 I hope you are able to start resting and recovering in your new place. I hope you can take some days off as well! I wanted to say I feel sorry that you guys walked into such a meat grinder on this project comparatively to P1. I know the pace is a lot more brutal, and while Argo and I have kind of got used to it, it came at a pretty steep cost to our overall quality of life and health. I am sad to know you are also feeling the pressure, and it only confirms that the pace at which we are all expected to work in the narrative team is kind of unsustainable. I really wish it wasn't such a constant rush – I don't think the best writing gets done in such a way.

So, it's definitely not you. We have been pointing out some of this stuff, including sprint length, since last winter. We had also been asking to have more writers hired since last December... It took the studio 6 months to start looking at candidates but then they changed their minds and said we'll manage somehow.

For what it's worth, you've been working so hard and making so much progress. It might not seem like it, but even taking in and comprehending the entire story was an enormous task, and honestly I think you might be the only person on the team who has fully succeeded at it. You are the first person who I feel has really understood the story and the characters! And your opinion and ideas are really valuable. You have really good instinct, and you're the only one who manages to hit the literary quality I would expect from an Elysium title. That's what matters. And learning branching dialogue structure is hard – it took everyone months if not years to really master it. I only wish you had the time to learn and practice at a non-stressful pace, because I would love to play a game written by you as I think you will really have valuable things to say.

And that's the thing, anyone can be taught structure, but no one can be taught how to have interesting

[redacted]

matters. And learning branching dialogue structure is hard – it took everyone months if not years to really master it. I only wish you had the time to learn and practice at a non-stressful pace, because I would love to play a game written by you as I think you will really have valuable things to say.

And that's the thing, anyone can be taught structure, but no one can be taught how to have interesting
things to say. That comes from who you are :)

It's been a tough few weeks, but if I can take away the stress over at least something, then it should be that you don't worry about your writing progress! We should all move as slowly as we need to, because that's just how long it takes to do good work 🤷 21:25 ✓✓

And don't hesitate to say if you ever feel something is unrealistic or hard or if you're just sick of a dialogue and want to try a different one. (Lord knows I know how it feels to be sitting for 4 hours in front of an open window and just not be able to add even two sentences... Or sometimes even get myself to sit at the dreaded computer at all.)

And also, if you feel isolated in Brighton or want to think through together on a dialogue or need to take your mind off things, we can always meet in London, you can happily crash at our place. 21:29 ✓✓

Dora, thank you **so much** for all of this. I really am so grateful for it. Yes, the time frame and the lack of experience do feel stressful. It feels a bit like the management side has no idea what it actually takes to write something good and conplex! But also, I have been having such a difficult time in my personal life the last couple of months, which

It's really good to know that I'm not alone in feeling all these things too (though I'm sorry if has been such a hard slog for you two for such a long time!) 22:19

[redacted]

25 October 2023

Sorry to hear you've been having private difficulties. If there's anything I or Argo can support you with let us know (he doesn't know a lot about [redacted] but he /can/ lift heavy things). I'm sure it's going to get better soon – it sounds like you are taking so many steps towards health! x

And it bears saying, don't feel like you have to worry or feel responsible for the deadline. It technically shouldn't even be Argo and I's problem anymore, it's Jim and the people above him who need to stress about that. I know it's an impossible ask, but try not to think about it too much! We all want it to be the best possible thing, but there's only so much work we can do. All we can do really is to focus on the present task, and to show that good work takes time. 00:15 ✓✓

[redacted]

Not "real job", but, you [illegible] [illegible]ed job! 07:34

25 October 2023

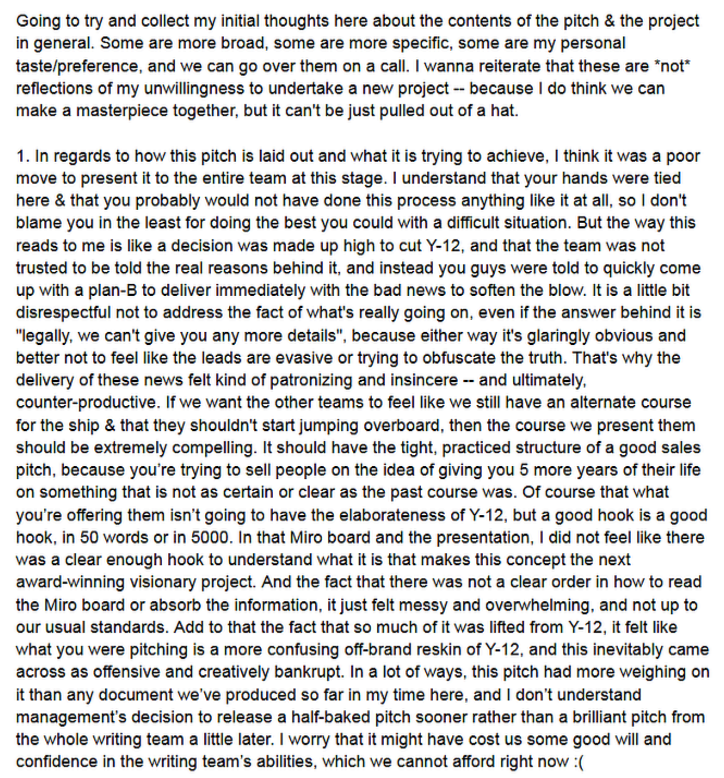
I'm just seeing this now, sorry it took me a whole day to get to it 🙂 Thank you for sharing, your friend's situation sounds really serious. And it sounds like it's invoking some serious stuff for you to work through as well. And honestly, that's what's important in life, not videogames. You shouldn't feel like any of us will feel let down when obviously real life stuff comes up like that. We're not surgeons, no one's going to die if we're behind on writing 🙂 A house move is a nightmare even without your mortgage stress and having to be so destabilized... I can imagine how it feels! But I know you're really strong and I can't imagine many people would've been able to handle even a fraction of it as well as you did! 18:07 ✓✓

Supporting a P1 writer through insecurity

ZA/UM also claimed that I unfairly criticized C4 and that I "refused" to work on it, in order to paint me as rude and insubordinate, which is completely false.

It's worth noting that every single piece of criticism I had for C4 was ultimately implemented during the first year of the project, including my concerns about sexist depictions, so my concerns were thus not unfounded. My criticisms about M0 and Collage Mode were also confirmed by press reviews once they were released. Both of these things are easily verifiable. I also never criticized C4 publicly in front of the team, as ZA/UM falsely claims. Conversations among leads and seniors, where more frank discussion must be had, sometimes got strongly opinionated but never spilled over onto the team, and presenting it otherwise is dishonest. I also never refused to work on C4 but was instead removed without anyone on the team being given an explanation, for which again I have evidence shown below. I even later received apologies from the company in 2023, from both Tõnis Haavel, Ed Tomaszewski and Chris P. (the latter in writing, documented below), who all expressed that our removal from C4 was unfair to us and destructive for the team. Was this what they truly felt, or was it just one more example of the kind of selective truth, broken telephone, lying interference which the ZA/UM management drips into various ears around the studio?

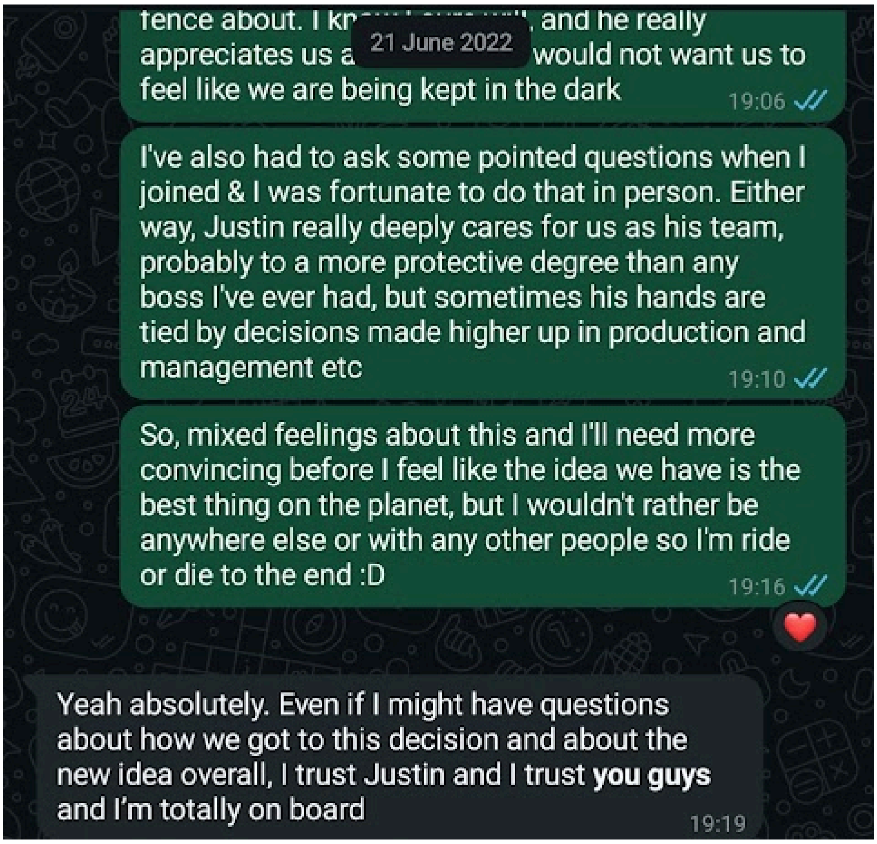
Here is the opening of the actual feedback document I sent to C4’s Narrative Director Justin Keenan at the inception of C4 around June 2022. The reason I had to do this in writing was because I had just moved into a new house and the lack of internet connection made it impossible to have a long call. For reference, I was slated to take on a leadership role under the Director and was the most senior writer on his team except for Argo, so critiquing concepts as equals was an established part of my role by then. As a senior discipline specialist, I felt expressing my professional opinion of the subject matter was warranted and not unusual, especially when there were such strong quality concerns at such a delicate time for the team, and other teammates were approaching me with worries about the project. I did so in private. I obviously emphasized several times that I wasn’t opposed to undertaking a new project and believed “**we can make a masterpiece together**”:



Going to try and collect my initial thoughts here about the contents of the pitch & the project in general. Some are more broad, some are more specific, some are my personal taste/preference, and we can go over them on a call. I wanna reiterate that these are *not* reflections of my unwillingness to undertake a new project -- because I do think we can make a masterpiece together, but it can't be just pulled out of a hat.

1. In regards to how this pitch is laid out and what it is trying to achieve, I think it was a poor move to present it to the entire team at this stage. I understand that your hands were tied here & that you probably would not have done this process anything like it at all, so I don't blame you in the least for doing the best you could with a difficult situation. But the way this reads to me is like a decision was made up high to cut Y-12, and that the team was not trusted to be told the real reasons behind it, and instead you guys were told to quickly come up with a plan-B to deliver immediately with the bad news to soften the blow. It is a little bit disrespectful not to address the fact of what's really going on, even if the answer behind it is "legally, we can't give you any more details", because either way it's glaringly obvious and better not to feel like the leads are evasive or trying to obfuscate the truth. That's why the delivery of these news felt kind of patronizing and insincere -- and ultimately, counter-productive. If we want the other teams to feel like we still have an alternate course for the ship & that they shouldn't start jumping overboard, then the course we present them should be extremely compelling. It should have the tight, practiced structure of a good sales pitch, because you’re trying to sell people on the idea of giving you 5 more years of their life on something that is not as certain or clear as the past course was. Of course that what you’re offering them isn’t going to have the elaborateness of Y-12, but a good hook is a good hook, in 50 words or in 5000. In that Miro board and the presentation, I did not feel like there was a clear enough hook to understand what it is that makes this concept the next award-winning visionary project. And the fact that there was not a clear order in how to read the Miro board or absorb the information, it just felt messy and overwhelming, and not up to our usual standards. Add to that the fact that so much of it was lifted from Y-12, it felt like what you were pitching is a more confusing off-brand reskin of Y-12, and this inevitably came across as offensive and creatively bankrupt. In a lot of ways, this pitch had more weighing on it than any document we’ve produced so far in my time here, and I don’t understand management’s decision to release a half-baked pitch sooner rather than a brilliant pitch from the whole writing team a little later. I worry that it might have cost us some good will and confidence in the writing team’s abilities, which we cannot afford right now :(

I was mostly worried about the writing team as a whole losing credibility and motivation in the eyes of the larger project team, because of the unsatisfactory quality of the project pitch which was shown to the studio before we had been given a chance to improve it together. I especially felt disappointed that the description of the female protagonist perpetuated offensive stereotypes about women. I would later be informed by the Narrative Director that this feedback of mine was considered "personally frustrating" to studio management. Regardless, this is what I wrote to one of my co-writers on the team, who was also feeling doubts about the project. I defended the Narrative Director and promised that I **"wouldn't rather be anywhere else or with any other people so I'm ride or die to the end":**



fence about. I kn and he really appreciates us a would not want us to feel like we are being kept in the dark 19:06

21 June 2022

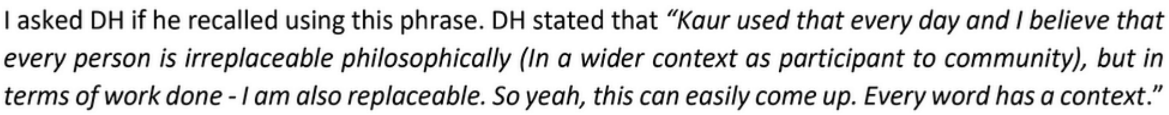
I've also had to ask some pointed questions when I joined & I was fortunate to do that in person. Either way, Justin really deeply cares for us as his team, probably to a more protective degree than any boss I've ever had, but sometimes his hands are tied by decisions made higher up in production and management etc 19:10

So, mixed feelings about this and I'll need more convincing before I feel like the idea we have is the best thing on the planet, but I wouldn't rather be anywhere else or with any other people so I'm ride or die to the end :D 19:16

❤️

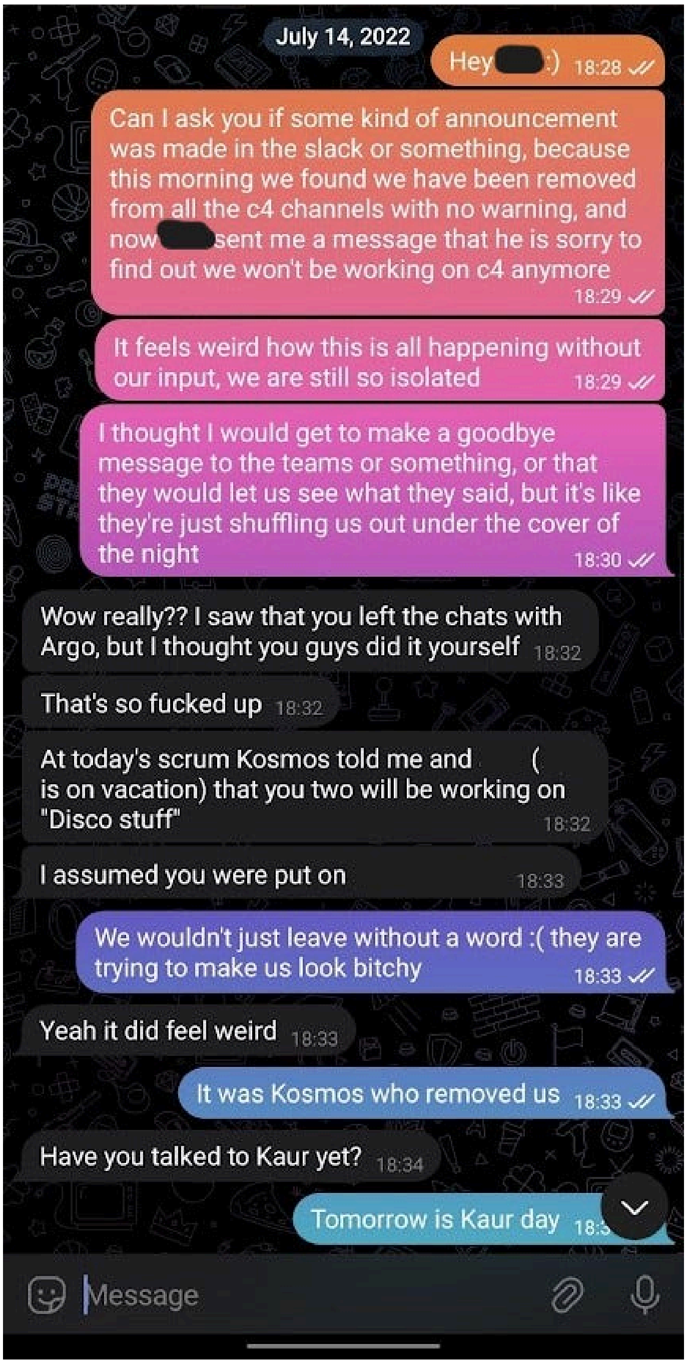
Yeah absolutely. Even if I might have questions about how we got to this decision and about the new idea overall, I trust Justin and I trust **you guys** and I'm totally on board 19:19

Up until the morning I was removed from C4, I still operated with the assumption that we would all continue working on it, I showed up to every call and every meeting, even flew to New York to discuss direction and mend the tensions despite being sick and on antibiotics, therefore there was nothing that could be considered "insubordination", as ZA/UM management so ominously put it. I now understand that any form of criticism or questioning of management's toxic and disruptive practices is in their eyes "insubordination". I still had strong concerns about the direction and everyone was in emotional turmoil due to such a significant change of project, but the intention was to spend two weeks brainstorming together. However, on 3rd July 2022, Argo and I were still abruptly removed from the project, told we have no choice but to take a flight back to UK and were asked to keep confidentiality about it from the rest of the team. We received a voice message from one of the members of the writing team that he's not sure what we've done, but that the Narrative Director was instructed by Tõnis and Kaur to "put his foot down" in order to consolidate his authority and the new direction and that the Narrative Director has said "something *needs to be done* about Dora and Argo", precisely in those ominous terms. Once we flew back to Europe, Kaur called Argo and throughout the conversation, repeatedly told him: **"Everyone is replaceable,"** a favourite ZA/UM management refrain we would also later hear from Tõnis. When he was later asked about it by an investigator, Tõnis (alias DH, Denis Havel) claimed:



I asked DH if he recalled using this phrase. DH stated that *"Kaur used that every day and I believe that every person is irreplaceable philosophically (In a wider context as participant to community), but in terms of work done - I am also replaceable. So yeah, this can easily come up. Every word has a context."*

We didn't know what was going to happen next. You can see that even 10 days later, we still had no idea what our status was, as we were suddenly and unceremoniously removed from all the Slack channels by production without allowing us to talk to our colleagues, and people were told we had abandoned the project of our own will. This marked the beginning of many, many months where we were isolated inside the company and forbidden from communicating with the majority of our colleagues with the purpose to conceal the impression that there was any instability in the studio, which had a horrible mental and emotional effect on us.



July 14, 2022

Hey [redacted] :) 18:28

Can I ask you if some kind of announcement was made in the slack or something, because this morning we found we have been removed from all the c4 channels with no warning, and now [redacted] sent me a message that he is sorry to find out we won't be working on c4 anymore 18:29

It feels weird how this is all happening without our input, we are still so isolated 18:29

I thought I would get to make a goodbye message to the teams or something, or that they would let us see what they said, but it's like they're just shuffling us out under the cover of the night 18:30

Wow really?? I saw that you left the chats with Argo, but I thought you guys did it yourself 18:32

That's so fucked up 18:32

At today's scrum Kosmos told me and (is on vacation) that you two will be working on "Disco stuff" 18:32

I assumed you were put on 18:33

We wouldn't just leave without a word :(they are trying to make us look bitchy 18:33

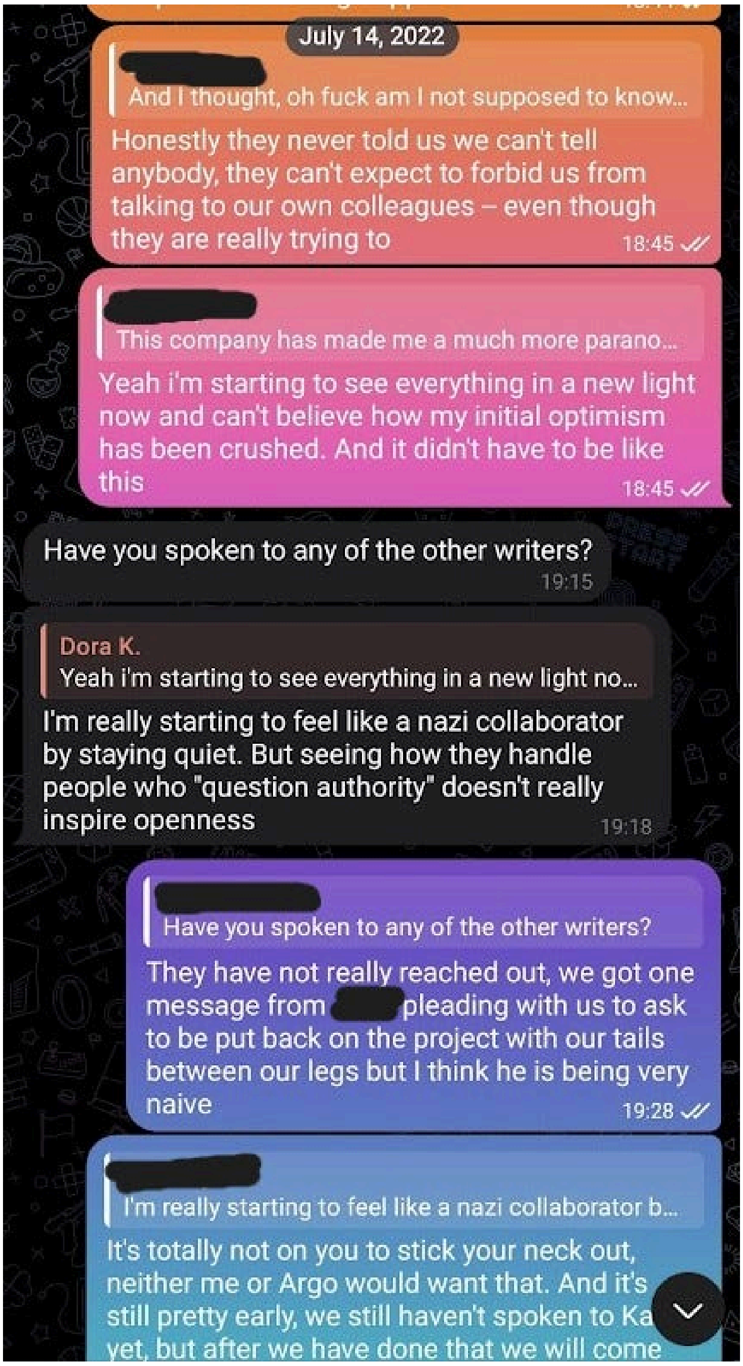
Yeah it did feel weird 18:33

It was Kosmos who removed us 18:33

Have you talked to Kaur yet? 18:34

Tomorrow is Kaur day 18:3

Message



July 14, 2022

[redacted]
And I thought, oh fuck am I not supposed to know...

Honestly they never told us we can't tell anybody, they can't expect to forbid us from talking to our own colleagues – even though they are really trying to 18:45

[redacted]
This company has made me a much more parano...

Yeah i'm starting to see everything in a new light now and can't believe how my initial optimism has been crushed. And it didn't have to be like this 18:45

Have you spoken to any of the other writers? 19:15

Dora K.
Yeah i'm starting to see everything in a new light no...

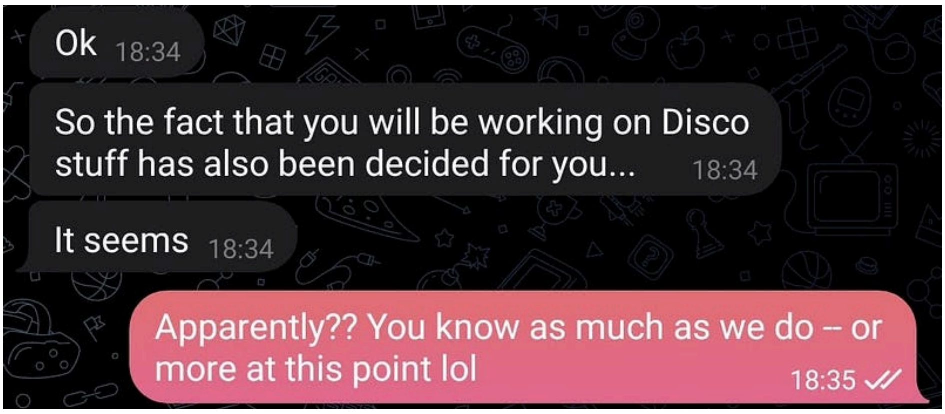
I'm really starting to feel like a nazi collaborator by staying quiet. But seeing how they handle people who "question authority" doesn't really inspire openness 19:18

[redacted]
Have you spoken to any of the other writers?

They have not really reached out, we got one message from [redacted] pleading with us to ask to be put back on the project with our tails between our legs but I think he is being very naive 19:28

[redacted]
I'm really starting to feel like a nazi collaborator b...

It's totally not on you to stick your neck out, neither me or Argo would want that. And it's still pretty early, we still haven't spoken to Ka yet, but after we have done that we will come

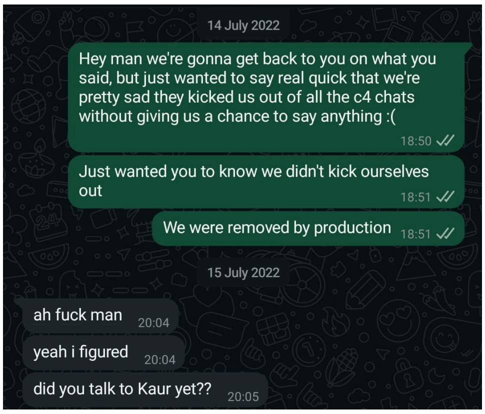


Ok 18:34

So the fact that you will be working on Disco stuff has also been decided for you... 18:34

It seems 18:34

Apparently?? You know as much as we do – or more at this point lol 18:35



14 July 2022

Hey man we're gonna get back to you on what you said, but just wanted to say real quick that we're pretty sad they kicked us out of all the c4 chats without giving us a chance to say anything :(18:50

Just wanted you to know we didn't kick ourselves out 18:51

We were removed by production 18:51

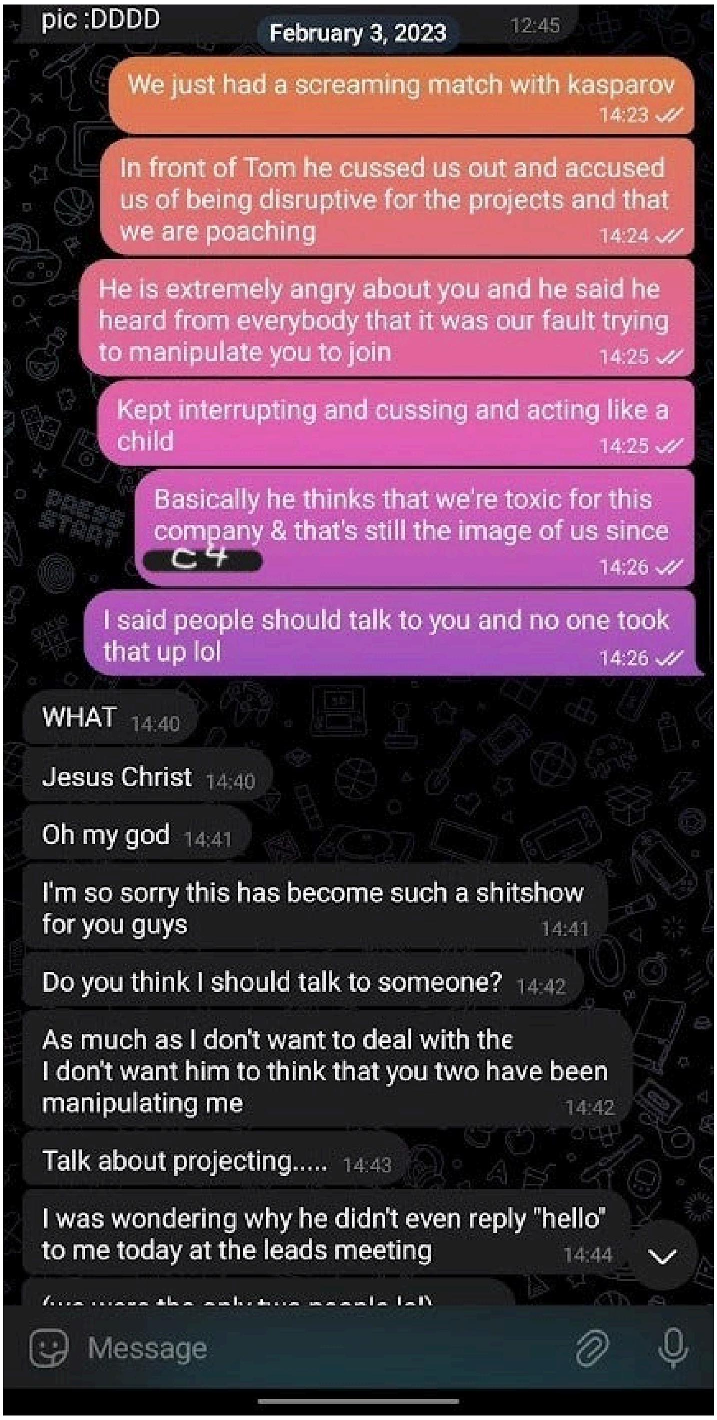
15 July 2022

ah fuck man 20:04

yeah i figured 20:04

did you talk to Kaur yet?? 20:05

It was apparent that the C4 Directors still held grudges against Argo and I even seven months later, because in February 2023 an incident occurred where the C4 Art Director verbally attacked us in a meeting, accusing us of poaching people from his project, when in reality the person in question had been the one to ask *us* to join our project and requested a transfer themselves. This wasn't the first time people had requested transfers off C4 and onto X7 entirely by their own will, because they had felt similarly disappointed in C4's early direction. Each time this had happened, the Narrative and Art Directors of C4 became bitter and aggressive and made accusations that Argo and I were somehow orchestrating these departures and called it "poaching", which is an absurdly adversarial term for two projects under the same roof. The Art Director did not listen, and instead viciously cussed and kept interrupting me with accusations. I ended up crying after this call and HR had to be called.



pic :DDDD 12:45

February 3, 2023

We just had a screaming match with kasparov 14:23

In front of Tom he cussed us out and accused us of being disruptive for the projects and that we are poaching 14:24

He is extremely angry about you and he said he heard from everybody that it was our fault trying to manipulate you to join 14:25

Kept interrupting and cussing and acting like a child 14:25

Basically he thinks that we're toxic for this company & that's still the image of us since C4 14:26

I said people should talk to you and no one took that up lol 14:26

WHAT 14:40

Jesus Christ 14:40

Oh my god 14:41

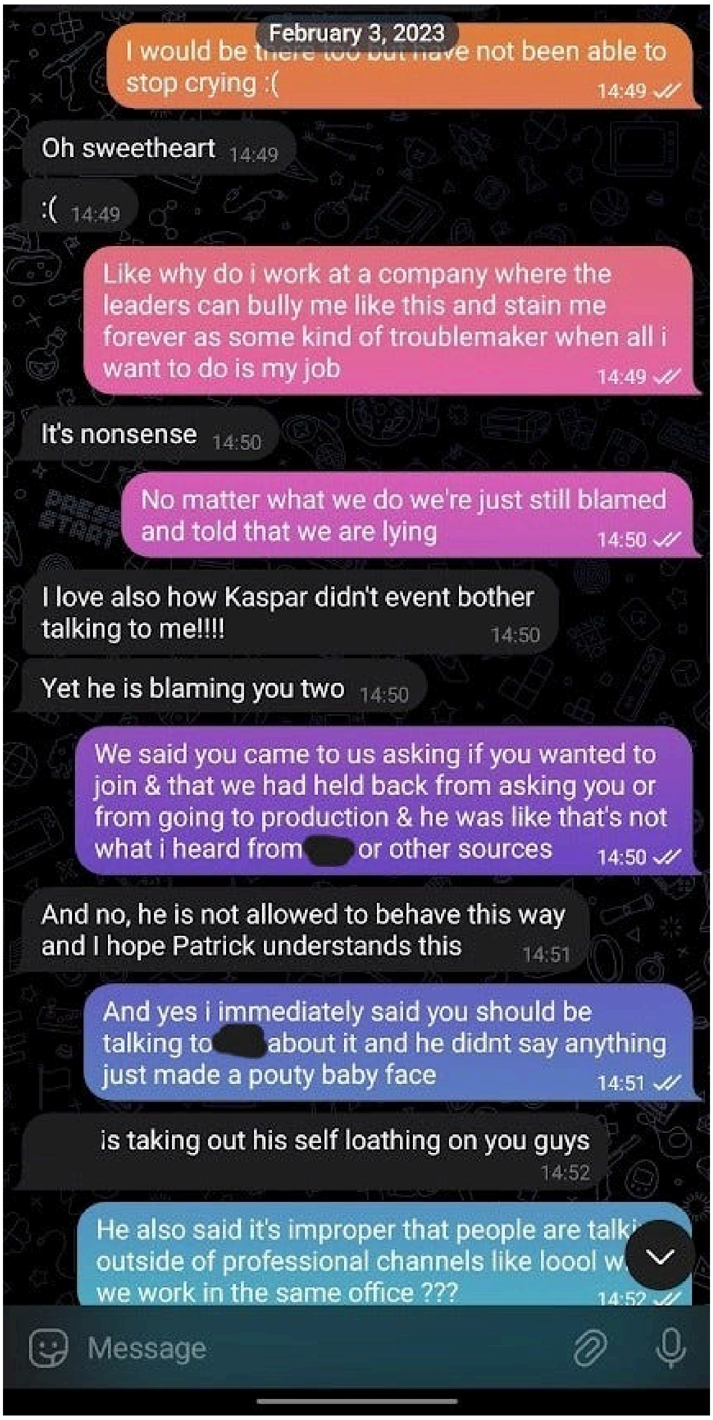
I'm so sorry this has become such a shitshow for you guys 14:41

Do you think I should talk to someone? 14:42

As much as I don't want to deal with the
I don't want him to think that you two have been manipulating me 14:42

Talk about projecting..... 14:43

I was wondering why he didn't even reply "hello" to me today at the leads meeting 14:44



February 3, 2023

I would be there too but have not been able to stop crying :(14:49

Oh sweetheart 14:49

:(14:49

Like why do i work at a company where the leaders can bully me like this and stain me forever as some kind of troublemaker when all i want to do is my job 14:49

It's nonsense 14:50

No matter what we do we're just still blamed and told that we are lying 14:50

I love also how Kaspar didn't event bother talking to me!!!! 14:50

Yet he is blaming you two 14:50

We said you came to us asking if you wanted to join & that we had held back from asking you or from going to production & he was like that's not what i heard from [redacted] or other sources 14:50

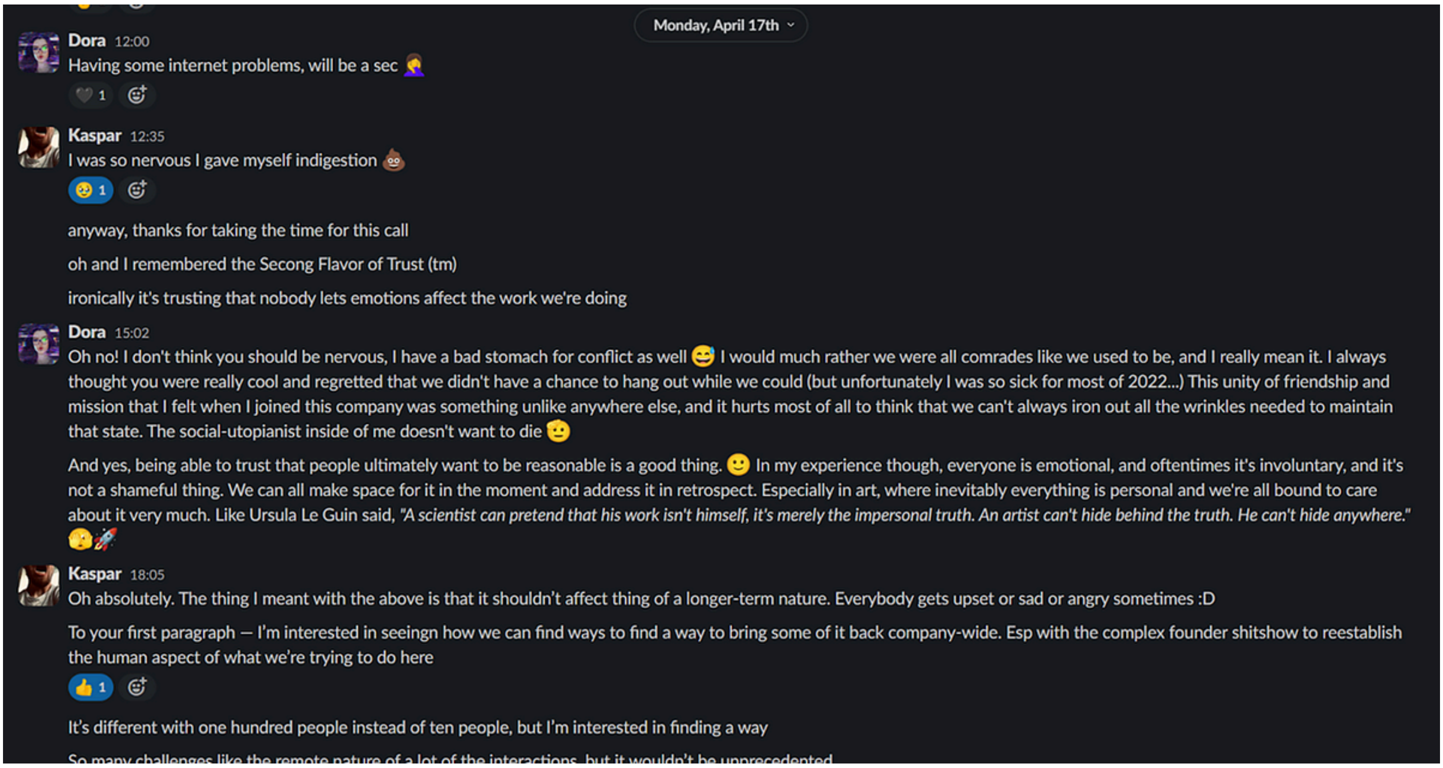
And no, he is not allowed to behave this way and I hope Patrick understands this 14:51

And yes i immediately said you should be talking to [redacted] about it and he didnt say anything just made a pouty baby face 14:51

is taking out his self loathing on you guys 14:52

He also said it's improper that people are talki outside of professional channels like loool w we work in the same office ??? 14:52

The incident led to Tõnis Haavel himself later visiting our Brighton home in February 2023 and apologizing to us on behalf of the company, claiming that we are "stronger" than himself for what we had been through since the C4 split, and that what the company had put us through was wrong. (The art director would later be asked by Tõnis to apologize to us—follows below.) Apology call was organized 2 months later:



Monday, April 17th

Dora 12:00
Having some internet problems, will be a sec 🤦‍♀️
🖤 1

Kaspar 12:35
I was so nervous I gave myself indigestion 💩
🥹 1

anyway, thanks for taking the time for this call

oh and I remembered the Secong Flavor of Trust (tm)

ironically it's trusting that nobody lets emotions affect the work we're doing

Dora 15:02
Oh no! I don't think you should be nervous, I have a bad stomach for conflict as well 😅 I would much rather we were all comrades like we used to be, and I really mean it. I always thought you were really cool and regretted that we didn't have a chance to hang out while we could (but unfortunately I was so sick for most of 2022...) This unity of friendship and mission that I felt when I joined this company was something unlike anywhere else, and it hurts most of all to think that we can't always iron out all the wrinkles needed to maintain that state. The social-utopianist inside of me doesn't want to die 🫡

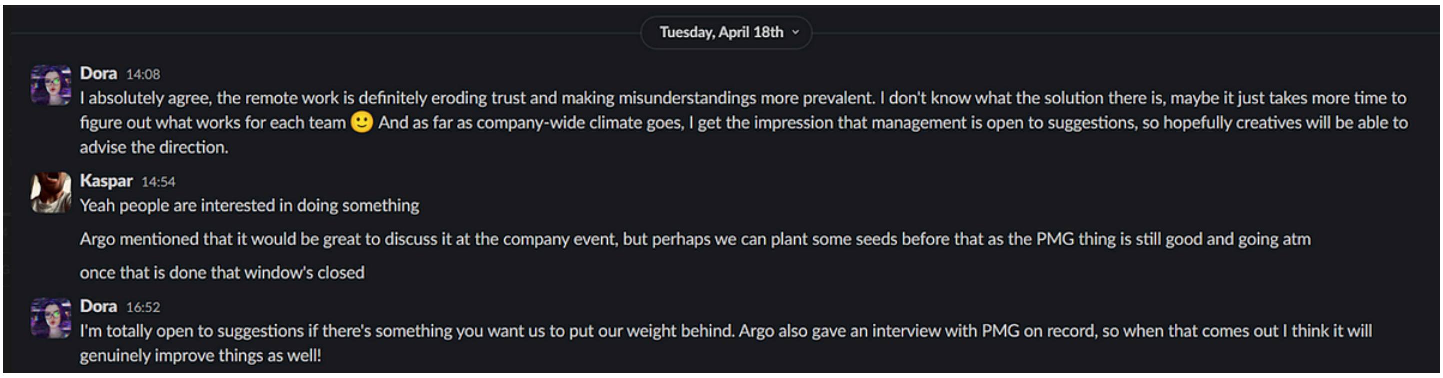
And yes, being able to trust that people ultimately want to be reasonable is a good thing. 🙂 In my experience though, everyone is emotional, and oftentimes it's involuntary, and it's not a shameful thing. We can all make space for it in the moment and address it in retrospect. Especially in art, where inevitably everything is personal and we're all bound to care about it very much. Like Ursula Le Guin said, *"A scientist can pretend that his work isn't himself, it's merely the impersonal truth. An artist can't hide behind the truth. He can't hide anywhere."* 🫣🚀

Kaspar 18:05
Oh absolutely. The thing I meant with the above is that it shouldn't affect thing of a longer-term nature. Everybody gets upset or sad or angry sometimes :D

To your first paragraph — I'm interested in seeingn how we can find ways to find a way to bring some of it back company-wide. Esp with the complex founder shitshow to reestablish the human aspect of what we're trying to do here
👍 1

It's different with one hundred people instead of ten people, but I'm interested in finding a way

So many challenges like the remote nature of a lot of the interactions, but it wouldn't be unprecedented



Tuesday, April 18th

Dora 14:08
I absolutely agree, the remote work is definitely eroding trust and making misunderstandings more prevalent. I don't know what the solution there is, maybe it just takes more time to figure out what works for each team 🙂 And as far as company-wide climate goes, I get the impression that management is open to suggestions, so hopefully creatives will be able to advise the direction.

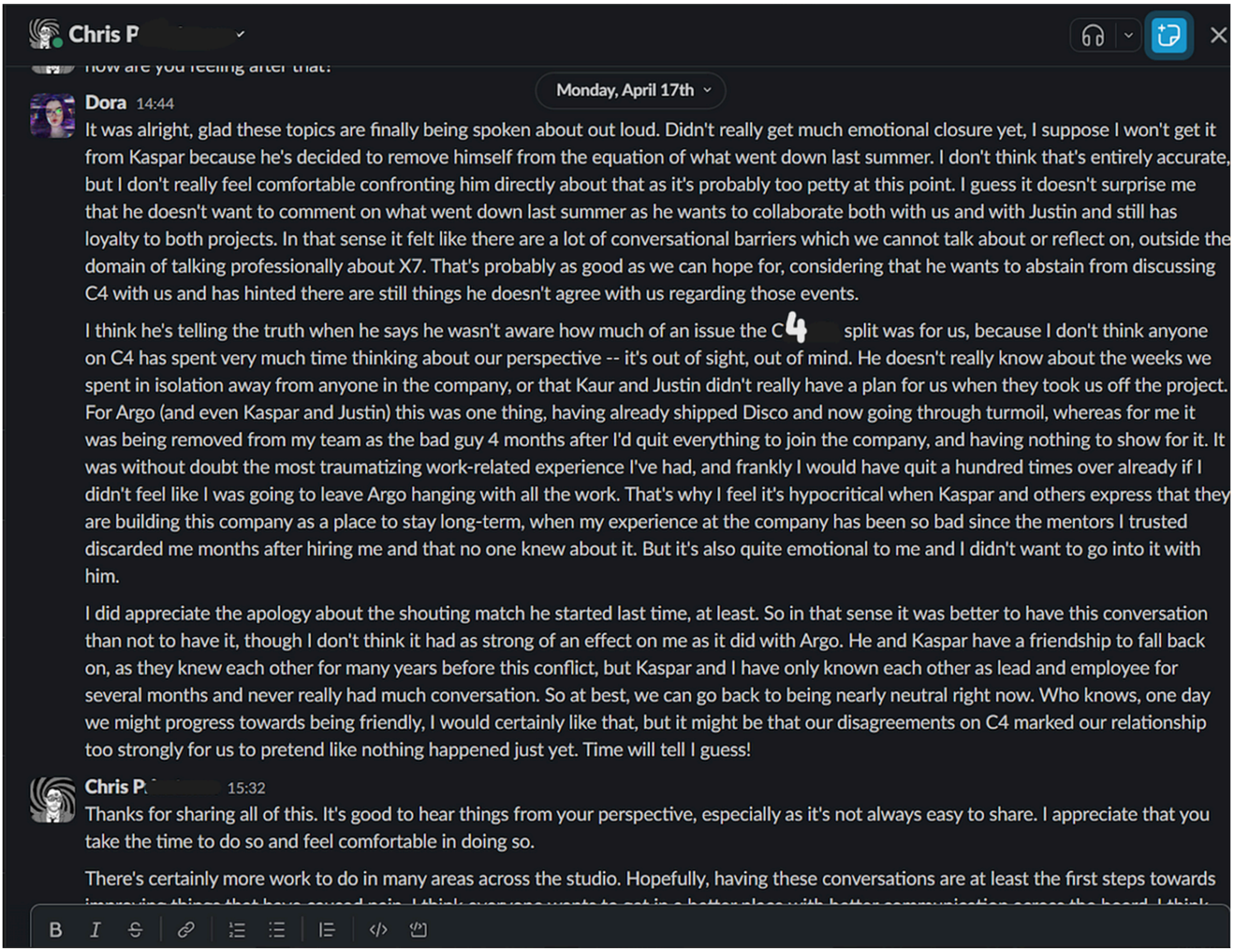
Kaspar 14:54
Yeah people are interested in doing something

Argo mentioned that it would be great to discuss it at the company event, but perhaps we can plant some seeds before that as the PMG thing is still good and going atm

once that is done that window's closed

Dora 16:52
I'm totally open to suggestions if there's something you want us to put our weight behind. Argo also gave an interview with PMG on record, so when that comes out I think it will genuinely improve things as well!

I was asked how I felt about this by Chris P., who was my lead at the time and who helped mediate this situation. I explained to him how unfair and traumatic the C4 rift was in my life, and how bad of a time I had been having at ZA/UM, and he apologized that I had to go through it at the company. I've always felt Chris was among the gentlest and most empathetic people at ZA/UM and I really appreciated this interaction. The communication from ZA/UM about my removal from C4 was uniformly apologetic and agreed that I was wronged, including HR, management and leads. This is why I am now surprised that ZA/UM is making a convenient "180" and claiming I was actually the problem all along.



How are you feeling after that?

Dora 14:44

It was alright, glad these topics are finally being spoken about out loud. Didn't really get much emotional closure yet, I suppose I won't get it from Kaspar because he's decided to remove himself from the equation of what went down last summer. I don't think that's entirely accurate, but I don't really feel comfortable confronting him directly about that as it's probably too petty at this point. I guess it doesn't surprise me that he doesn't want to comment on what went down last summer as he wants to collaborate both with us and with Justin and still has loyalty to both projects. In that sense it felt like there are a lot of conversational barriers which we cannot talk about or reflect on, outside the domain of talking professionally about X7. That's probably as good as we can hope for, considering that he wants to abstain from discussing C4 with us and has hinted there are still things he doesn't agree with us regarding those events.

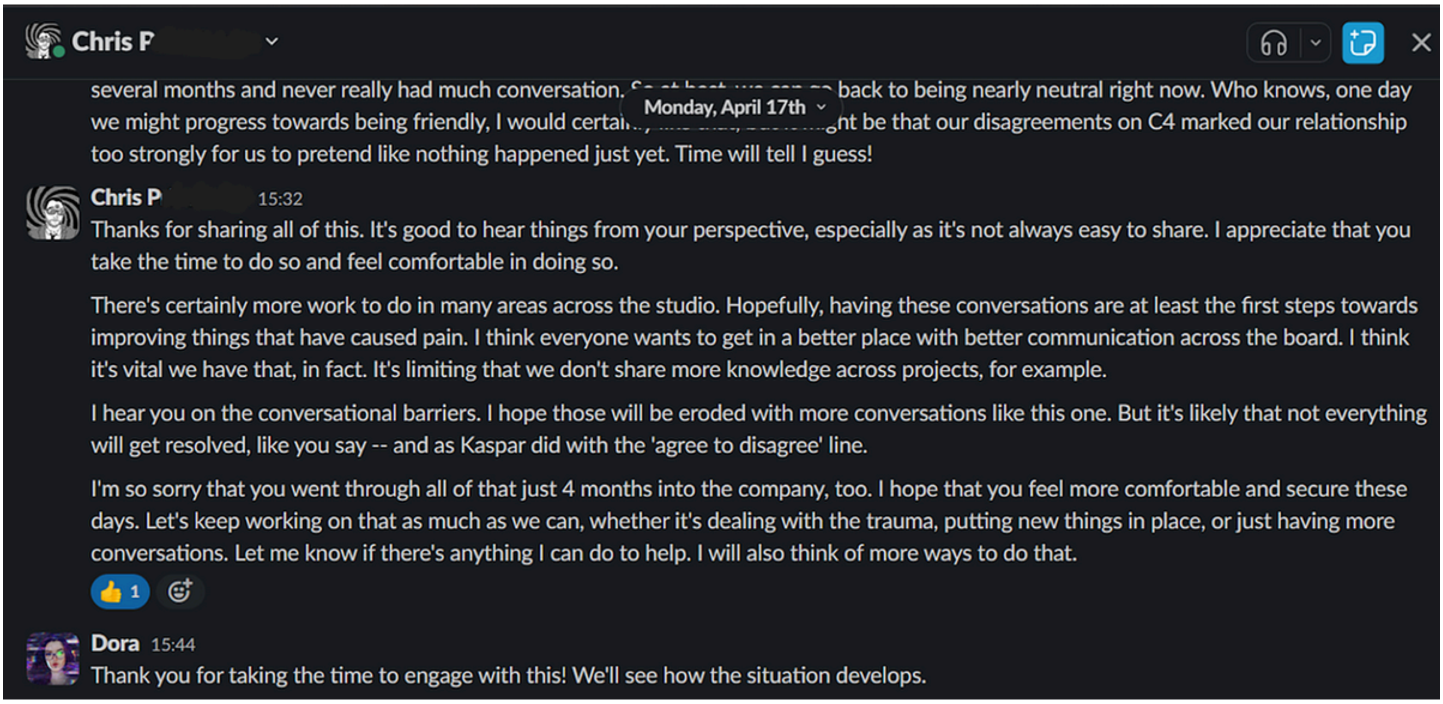
I think he's telling the truth when he says he wasn't aware how much of an issue the C4 [redacted] split was for us, because I don't think anyone on C4 has spent very much time thinking about our perspective -- it's out of sight, out of mind. He doesn't really know about the weeks we spent in isolation away from anyone in the company, or that Kaur and Justin didn't really have a plan for us when they took us off the project. For Argo (and even Kaspar and Justin) this was one thing, having already shipped Disco and now going through turmoil, whereas for me it was being removed from my team as the bad guy 4 months after I'd quit everything to join the company, and having nothing to show for it. It was without doubt the most traumatizing work-related experience I've had, and frankly I would have quit a hundred times over already if I didn't feel like I was going to leave Argo hanging with all the work. That's why I feel it's hypocritical when Kaspar and others express that they are building this company as a place to stay long-term, when my experience at the company has been so bad since the mentors I trusted discarded me months after hiring me and that no one knew about it. But it's also quite emotional to me and I didn't want to go into it with him.

I did appreciate the apology about the shouting match he started last time, at least. So in that sense it was better to have this conversation than not to have it, though I don't think it had as strong of an effect on me as it did with Argo. He and Kaspar have a friendship to fall back on, as they knew each other for many years before this conflict, but Kaspar and I have only known each other as lead and employee for several months and never really had much conversation. So at best, we can go back to being nearly neutral right now. Who knows, one day we might progress towards being friendly, I would certainly like that, but it might be that our disagreements on C4 marked our relationship too strongly for us to pretend like nothing happened just yet. Time will tell I guess!

Chris P. [redacted] 15:32

Thanks for sharing all of this. It's good to hear things from your perspective, especially as it's not always easy to share. I appreciate that you take the time to do so and feel comfortable in doing so.

There's certainly more work to do in many areas across the studio. Hopefully, having these conversations are at least the first steps towards



several months and never really had much conversation. So at best, we can go back to being nearly neutral right now. Who knows, one day we might progress towards being friendly, I would certainly like that, but it might be that our disagreements on C4 marked our relationship too strongly for us to pretend like nothing happened just yet. Time will tell I guess!

Chris P [redacted] 15:32

Thanks for sharing all of this. It's good to hear things from your perspective, especially as it's not always easy to share. I appreciate that you take the time to do so and feel comfortable in doing so.

There's certainly more work to do in many areas across the studio. Hopefully, having these conversations are at least the first steps towards improving things that have caused pain. I think everyone wants to get in a better place with better communication across the board. I think it's vital we have that, in fact. It's limiting that we don't share more knowledge across projects, for example.

I hear you on the conversational barriers. I hope those will be eroded with more conversations like this one. But it's likely that not everything will get resolved, like you say -- and as Kaspar did with the 'agree to disagree' line.

I'm so sorry that you went through all of that just 4 months into the company, too. I hope that you feel more comfortable and secure these days. Let's keep working on that as much as we can, whether it's dealing with the trauma, putting new things in place, or just having more conversations. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help. I will also think of more ways to do that.

👍 1

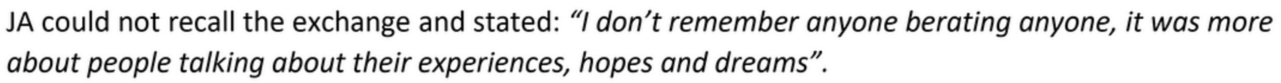
Dora 15:44

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this! We'll see how the situation develops.

I was never placed under any performance improvement plan, disciplinary nor an external investigation, nor was ZA/UM ever able to present any documentation, statements, or evidence to me or my trade union representative regarding any alleged interpersonal misconduct on my part during my entire employment at ZA/UM. There was never an external investigation, only a sham internal investigation which never went anywhere for 3 months, conducted last minute by the same group who have already had good practice at manufacturing consensus to dismiss and silence employees who were personally distasteful to management.

A large number of people involved were all named in my Grievance document as being parties to cover-ups of management misconduct themselves, and the investigation never produced any actionable document or evidence in nearly three months that they could have done so. **Imagine my surprise when I learn that ZA/UM are now claiming that allegedly legitimate confidential records about my HR investigation indeed exist and are sharing them with third parties.** It is neither legal within privacy laws, nor very convincing, nor in line with employment law procedures, for ZA/UM to distribute unverified HR documents to press. It is also certainly cowardly. Nothing was ever provided to me or my union representative for us to exercise our right to review or refute or even to confirm its legitimacy. My understanding is that this unverified "investigation" was conveniently assembled *in absentia* after I constructively resigned from the company at the direct advice of my union representative, as no documentation was shown to exist during my tenure at the company.

As for their claim that they went "above and beyond" to investigate my own complaint externally and found it unsubstantiated… The external HR company they contracted for the task has an advertising blurb on their website where they are being promoted by the same legal company which represents ZA/UM. It's also worth noting that at that time, at the advice of our trade union representative, neither Argo nor I had revealed to ZA/UM the extent of incriminating audio recordings we had of the abusive and disgraceful conduct of their leads. I wanted to give them a chance to show how honest they are. I was also at that time preparing to meet them in court, and so the demonstrable lies they gave during their investigation when they thought I didn't have evidence would prove useful when compared against the recordings. You would be surprised how many players in this story who represent themselves as honorable denied ever witnessing conduct from Tõnis and his subordinates which I have recorded them witnessing.



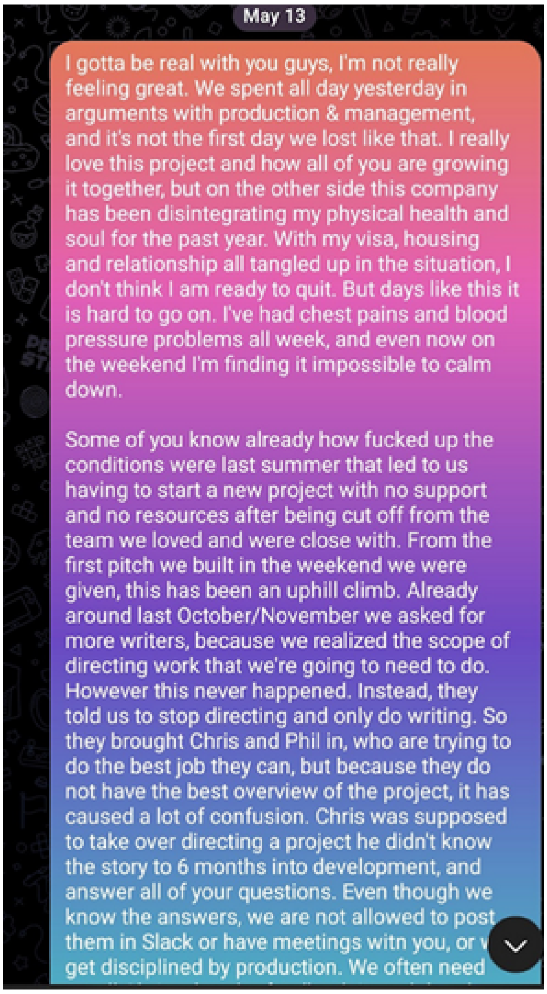
JA could not recall the exchange and stated: *“I don’t remember anyone berating anyone, it was more about people talking about their experiences, hopes and dreams”*.

Excerpt from investigation into Tõnis’s recorded misconduct

I’m not at all hesitant to show evidence for my claims. People Make Games couldn’t safely publish covert audio recordings as it would have given legal recourse to ZA/UM to attempt to take their content down. I would rather not be forced to release the recordings, as I want the ZA/UM workers to be able to work in peace on their new project, and for ZA/UM to let me work in peace myself, so I hope ZA/UM will refrain from making any further statements about me and let the matter rest.

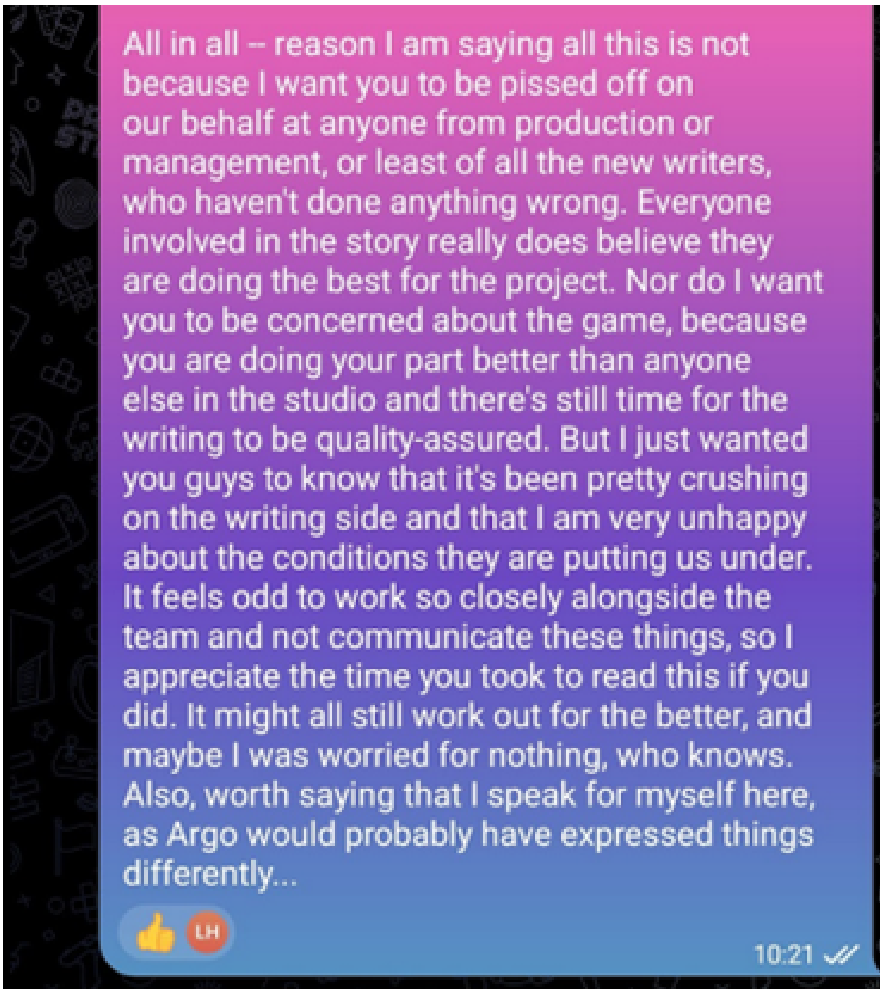
I fought for more sustainable working conditions on X7 and I fought for our team. The kindness and respect of our colleagues who were actually boots on the ground and were since laid off, means more than the vitriol of leftover leads who now continue to smear us in a desperate attempt to better the commercial chances of their future products.

Here are numerous messages Argo and I exchanged with our X7 team, about all of our shared hardships, pains, challenges and loves:

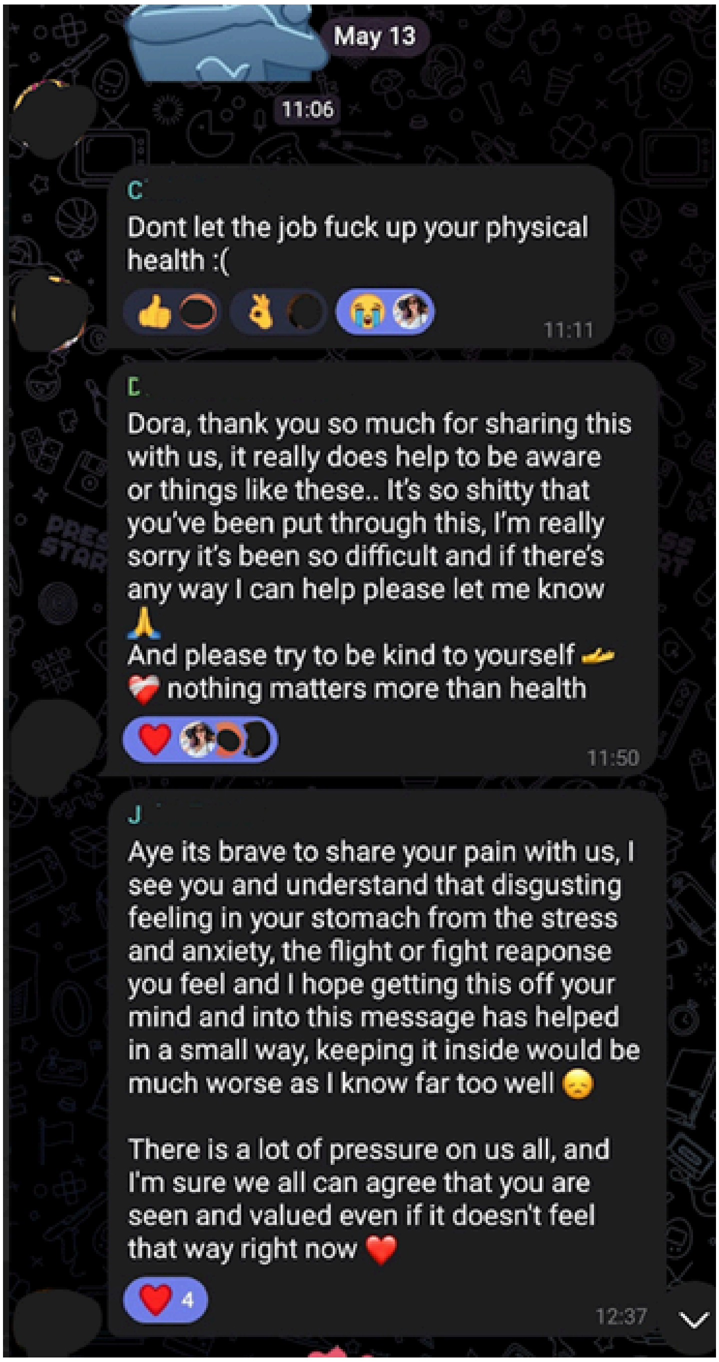


I gotta be real with you guys, I'm not really feeling great. We spent all day yesterday in arguments with production & management, and it's not the first day we lost like that. I really love this project and how all of you are growing it together, but on the other side this company has been disintegrating my physical health and soul for the past year. With my visa, housing and relationship all tangled up in the situation, I don't think I am ready to quit. But days like this it is hard to go on. I've had chest pains and blood pressure problems all week, and even now on the weekend I'm finding it impossible to calm down.

Some of you know already how fucked up the conditions were last summer that led to us having to start a new project with no support and no resources after being cut off from the team we loved and were close with. From the first pitch we built in the weekend we were given, this has been an uphill climb. Already around last October/November we asked for more writers, because we realized the scope of directing work that we're going to need to do. However this never happened. Instead, they told us to stop directing and only do writing. So they brought Chris and Phil in, who are trying to do the best job they can, but because they do not have the best overview of the project, it has caused a lot of confusion. Chris was supposed to take over directing a project he didn't know the story to 6 months into development, and answer all of your questions. Even though we know the answers, we are not allowed to post them in Slack or have meetings witn you, or v
get disciplined by production. We often need



All in all -- reason I am saying all this is not because I want you to be pissed off on our behalf at anyone from production or management, or least of all the new writers, who haven't done anything wrong. Everyone involved in the story really does believe they are doing the best for the project. Nor do I want you to be concerned about the game, because you are doing your part better than anyone else in the studio and there's still time for the writing to be quality-assured. But I just wanted you guys to know that it's been pretty crushing on the writing side and that I am very unhappy about the conditions they are putting us under. It feels odd to work so closely alongside the team and not communicate these things, so I appreciate the time you took to read this if you did. It might all still work out for the better, and maybe I was worried for nothing, who knows. Also, worth saying that I speak for myself here, as Argo would probably have expressed things differently...



May 13

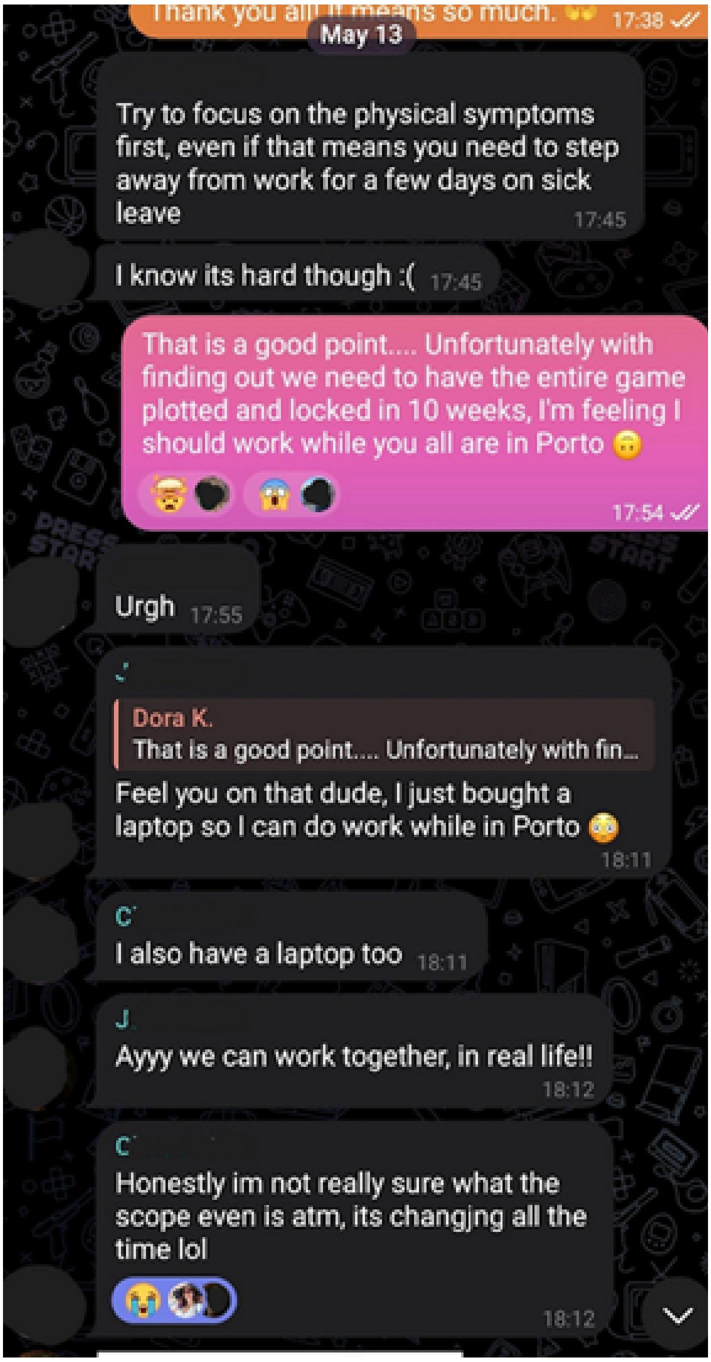
11:06

[redacted] C[redacted]
Dont let the job fuck up your physical health :(
👍 👌 😭 11:11

[redacted] C[redacted]
Dora, thank you so much for sharing this with us, it really does help to be aware or things like these.. It's so shitty that you've been put through this, I'm really sorry it's been so difficult and if there's any way I can help please let me know 🙏
And please try to be kind to yourself 🫴 ❤️‍🩹 nothing matters more than health
❤️ 11:50

[redacted] J[redacted]
Aye its brave to share your pain with us, I see you and understand that disgusting feeling in your stomach from the stress and anxiety, the flight or fight reaponse you feel and I hope getting this off your mind and into this message has helped in a small way, keeping it inside would be much worse as I know far too well 😞

There is a lot of pressure on us all, and I'm sure we all can agree that you are seen and valued even if it doesn't feel that way right now ❤️
❤️ 4 12:37



Thank you all! It means so much. 👐 17:38

May 13

[redacted]
Try to focus on the physical symptoms first, even if that means you need to step away from work for a few days on sick leave 17:45

I know its hard though :(17:45

That is a good point.... Unfortunately with finding out we need to have the entire game plotted and locked in 10 weeks, I'm feeling I should work while you all are in Porto 🙃
🤯 😱 17:54

[redacted]
Urgh 17:55

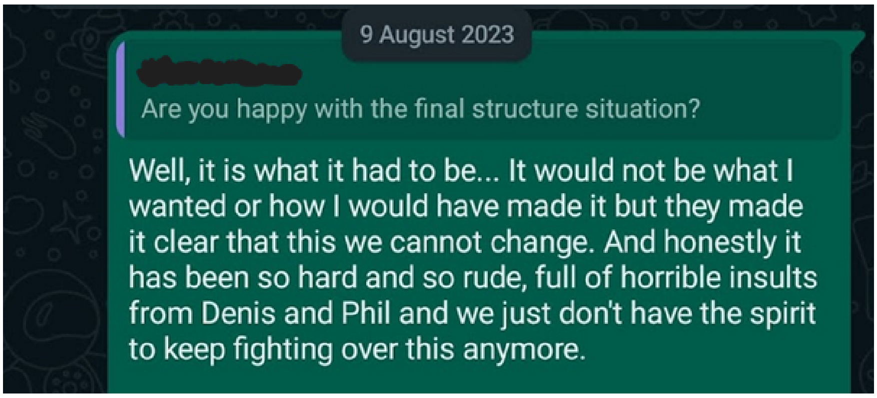
[redacted]
> Dora K.
> That is a good point.... Unfortunately with fin...

Feel you on that dude, I just bought a laptop so I can do work while in Porto 😳 18:11

[redacted] C[redacted]
I also have a laptop too 18:11

[redacted] J[redacted]
Ayyy we can work together, in real life!! 18:12

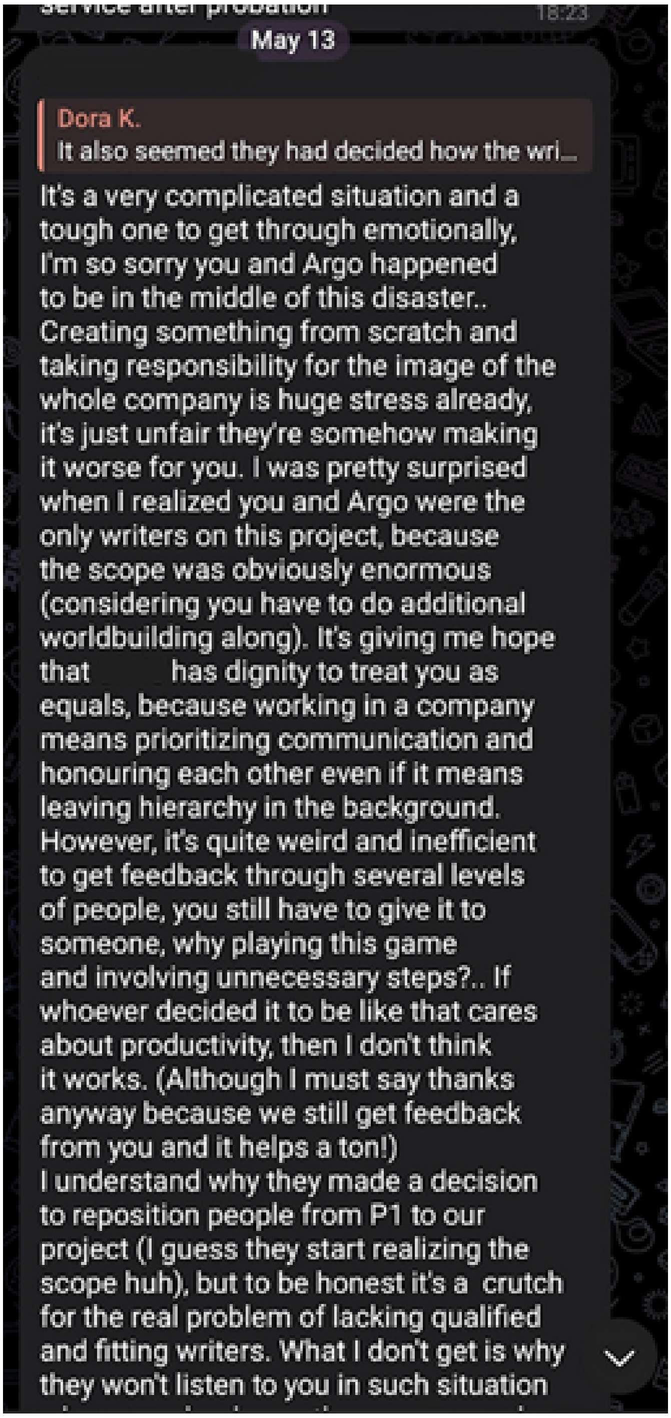
[redacted] C[redacted]
Honestly im not really sure what the scope even is atm, its changjng all the time lol
😭 18:12



9 August 2023

> [redacted]
> Are you happy with the final structure situation?

Well, it is what it had to be... It would not be what I wanted or how I would have made it but they made it clear that this we cannot change. And honestly it has been so hard and so rude, full of horrible insults from Denis and Phil and we just don't have the spirit to keep fighting over this anymore.

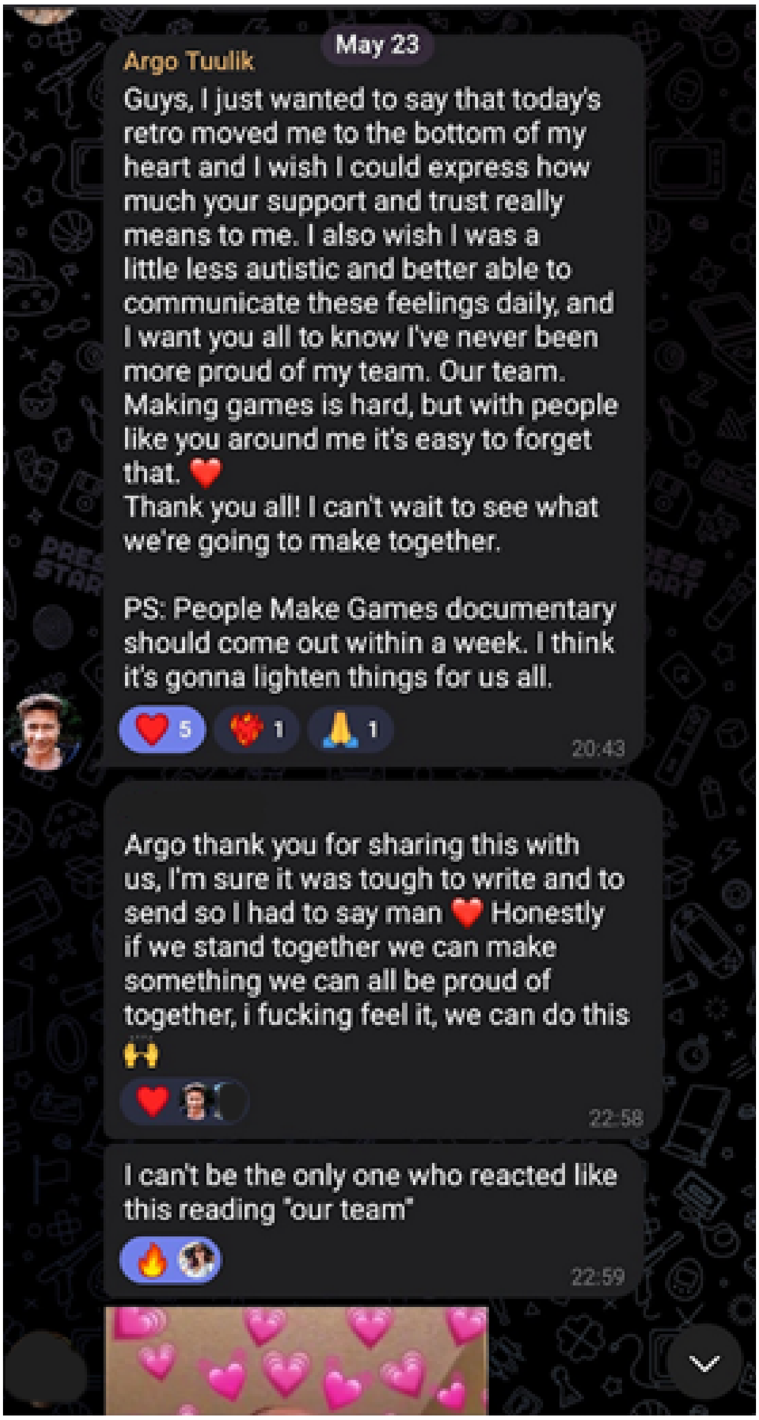


service after probation 18:23

May 13

> **Dora K.**
> It also seemed they had decided how the wri...

It's a very complicated situation and a tough one to get through emotionally, I'm so sorry you and Argo happened to be in the middle of this disaster.. Creating something from scratch and taking responsibility for the image of the whole company is huge stress already, it's just unfair they're somehow making it worse for you. I was pretty surprised when I realized you and Argo were the only writers on this project, because the scope was obviously enormous (considering you have to do additional worldbuilding along). It's giving me hope that [redacted] has dignity to treat you as equals, because working in a company means prioritizing communication and honouring each other even if it means leaving hierarchy in the background. However, it's quite weird and inefficient to get feedback through several levels of people, you still have to give it to someone, why playing this game and involving unnecessary steps?.. If whoever decided it to be like that cares about productivity, then I don't think it works. (Although I must say thanks anyway because we still get feedback from you and it helps a ton!)
I understand why they made a decision to reposition people from P1 to our project (I guess they start realizing the scope huh), but to be honest it's a crutch for the real problem of lacking qualified and fitting writers. What I don't get is why they won't listen to you in such situation



May 23

Argo Tuulik

Guys, I just wanted to say that today's retro moved me to the bottom of my heart and I wish I could express how much your support and trust really means to me. I also wish I was a little less autistic and better able to communicate these feelings daily, and I want you all to know I've never been more proud of my team. Our team. Making games is hard, but with people like you around me it's easy to forget that. ❤️
Thank you all! I can't wait to see what we're going to make together.

PS: People Make Games documentary should come out within a week. I think it's gonna lighten things for us all.

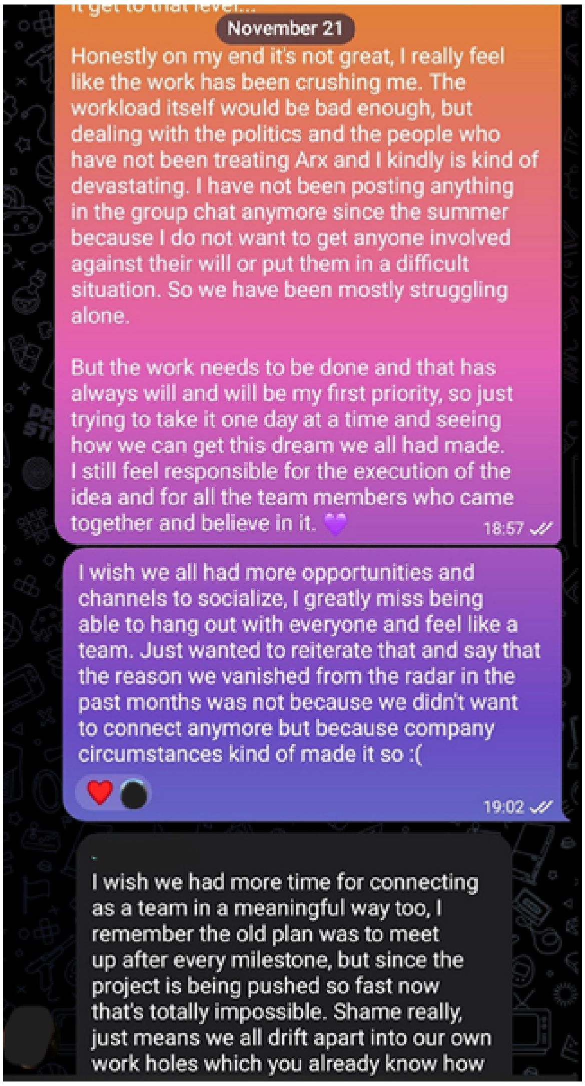
❤️ 5 ❤️ 1 🙏 1 20:43

Argo thank you for sharing this with us, I'm sure it was tough to write and to send so I had to say man ❤️ Honestly if we stand together we can make something we can all be proud of together, i fucking feel it, we can do this 🙌

❤️ 22:58

I can't be the only one who reacted like this reading "our team"

🔥 22:59



it get to that level...

November 21

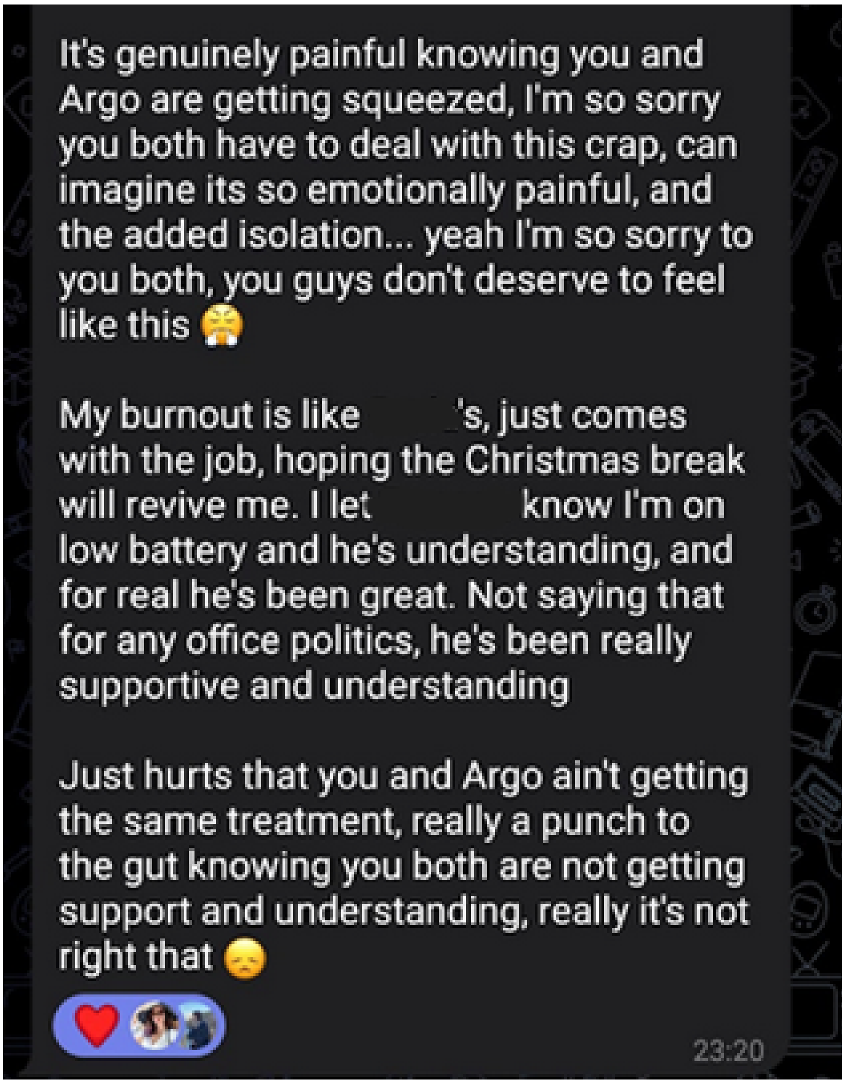
Honestly on my end it's not great, I really feel like the work has been crushing me. The workload itself would be bad enough, but dealing with the politics and the people who have not been treating Arx and I kindly is kind of devastating. I have not been posting anything in the group chat anymore since the summer because I do not want to get anyone involved against their will or put them in a difficult situation. So we have been mostly struggling alone.

But the work needs to be done and that has always will and will be my first priority, so just trying to take it one day at a time and seeing how we can get this dream we all had made. I still feel responsible for the execution of the idea and for all the team members who came together and believe in it. 💜 18:57

I wish we all had more opportunities and channels to socialize, I greatly miss being able to hang out with everyone and feel like a team. Just wanted to reiterate that and say that the reason we vanished from the radar in the past months was not because we didn't want to connect anymore but because company circumstances kind of made it so :(

❤️ 19:02

I wish we had more time for connecting as a team in a meaningful way too, I remember the old plan was to meet up after every milestone, but since the project is being pushed so fast now that's totally impossible. Shame really, just means we all drift apart into our own work holes which you already know how

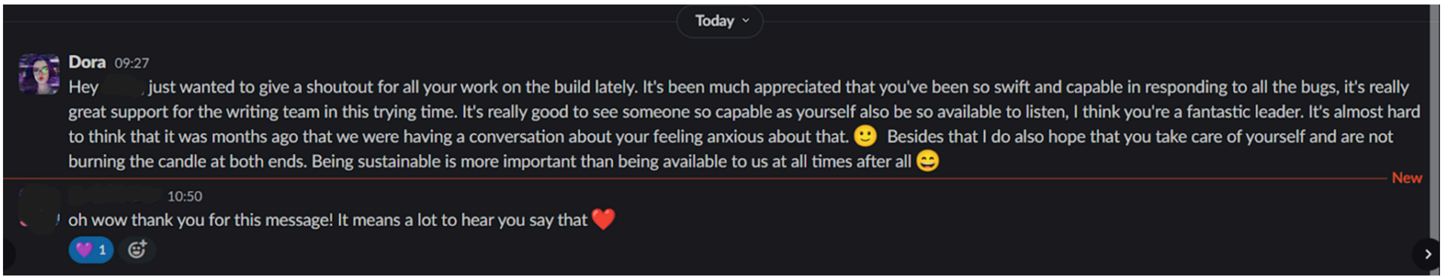


It's genuinely painful knowing you and Argo are getting squeezed, I'm so sorry you both have to deal with this crap, can imagine its so emotionally painful, and the added isolation... yeah I'm so sorry to you both, you guys don't deserve to feel like this 😤

My burnout is like [redacted]'s, just comes with the job, hoping the Christmas break will revive me. I let [redacted] know I'm on low battery and he's understanding, and for real he's been great. Not saying that for any office politics, he's been really supportive and understanding

Just hurts that you and Argo ain't getting the same treatment, really a punch to the gut knowing you both are not getting support and understanding, really it's not right that 😞

❤️ 23:20

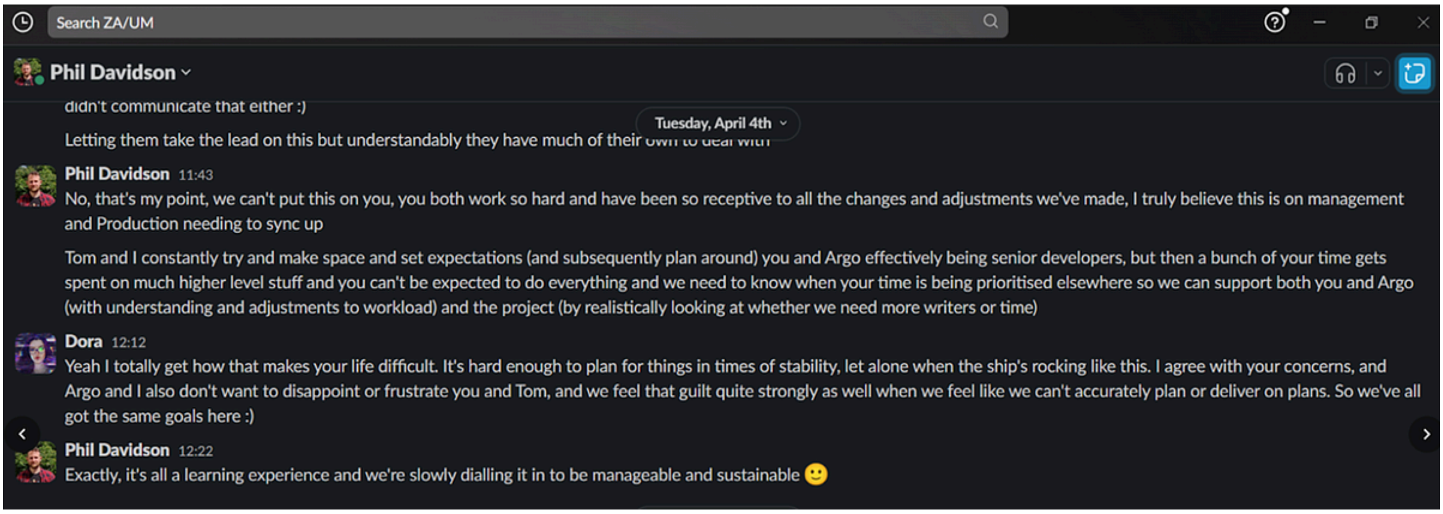


Today

Dora 09:27
Hey [redacted], just wanted to give a shoutout for all your work on the build lately. It's been much appreciated that you've been so swift and capable in responding to all the bugs, it's really great support for the writing team in this trying time. It's really good to see someone so capable as yourself also be so available to listen, I think you're a fantastic leader. It's almost hard to think that it was months ago that we were having a conversation about your feeling anxious about that. 🙂 Besides that I do also hope that you take care of yourself and are not burning the candle at both ends. Being sustainable is more important than being available to us at all times after all 😄

New

[redacted] 10:50
oh wow thank you for this message! It means a lot to hear you say that ❤️
💜 1



Search ZA/UM

Phil Davidson

didn't communicate that either :)

Tuesday, April 4th

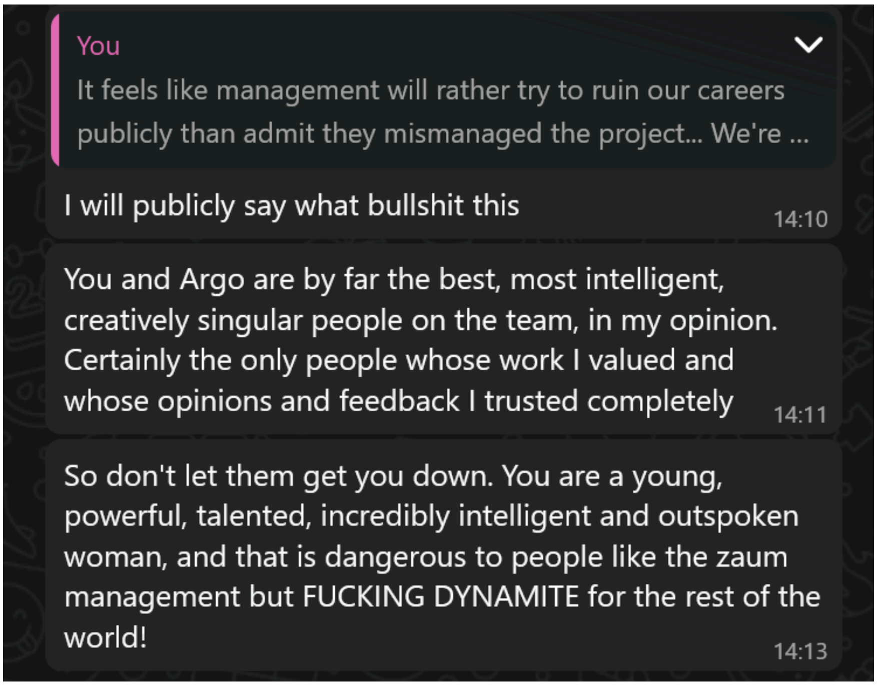
Letting them take the lead on this but understandably they have much of their own to deal with

Phil Davidson 11:43
No, that's my point, we can't put this on you, you both work so hard and have been so receptive to all the changes and adjustments we've made, I truly believe this is on management and Production needing to sync up

Tom and I constantly try and make space and set expectations (and subsequently plan around) you and Argo effectively being senior developers, but then a bunch of your time gets spent on much higher level stuff and you can't be expected to do everything and we need to know when your time is being prioritised elsewhere so we can support both you and Argo (with understanding and adjustments to workload) and the project (by realistically looking at whether we need more writers or time)

Dora 12:12
Yeah I totally get how that makes your life difficult. It's hard enough to plan for things in times of stability, let alone when the ship's rocking like this. I agree with your concerns, and Argo and I also don't want to disappoint or frustrate you and Tom, and we feel that guilt quite strongly as well when we feel like we can't accurately plan or deliver on plans. So we've all got the same goals here :)

Phil Davidson 12:22
Exactly, it's all a learning experience and we're slowly dialling it in to be manageable and sustainable 🙂

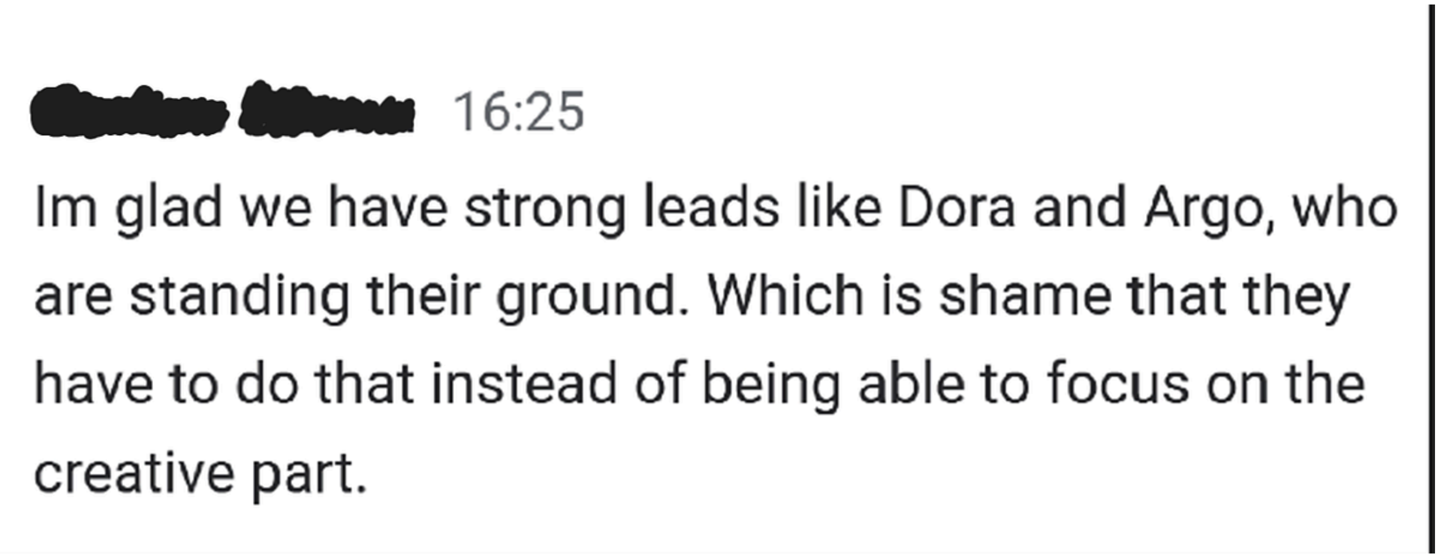


You
It feels like management will rather try to ruin our careers publicly than admit they mismanaged the project... We're ...

I will publicly say what bullshit this 14:10

You and Argo are by far the best, most intelligent, creatively singular people on the team, in my opinion. Certainly the only people whose work I valued and whose opinions and feedback I trusted completely 14:11

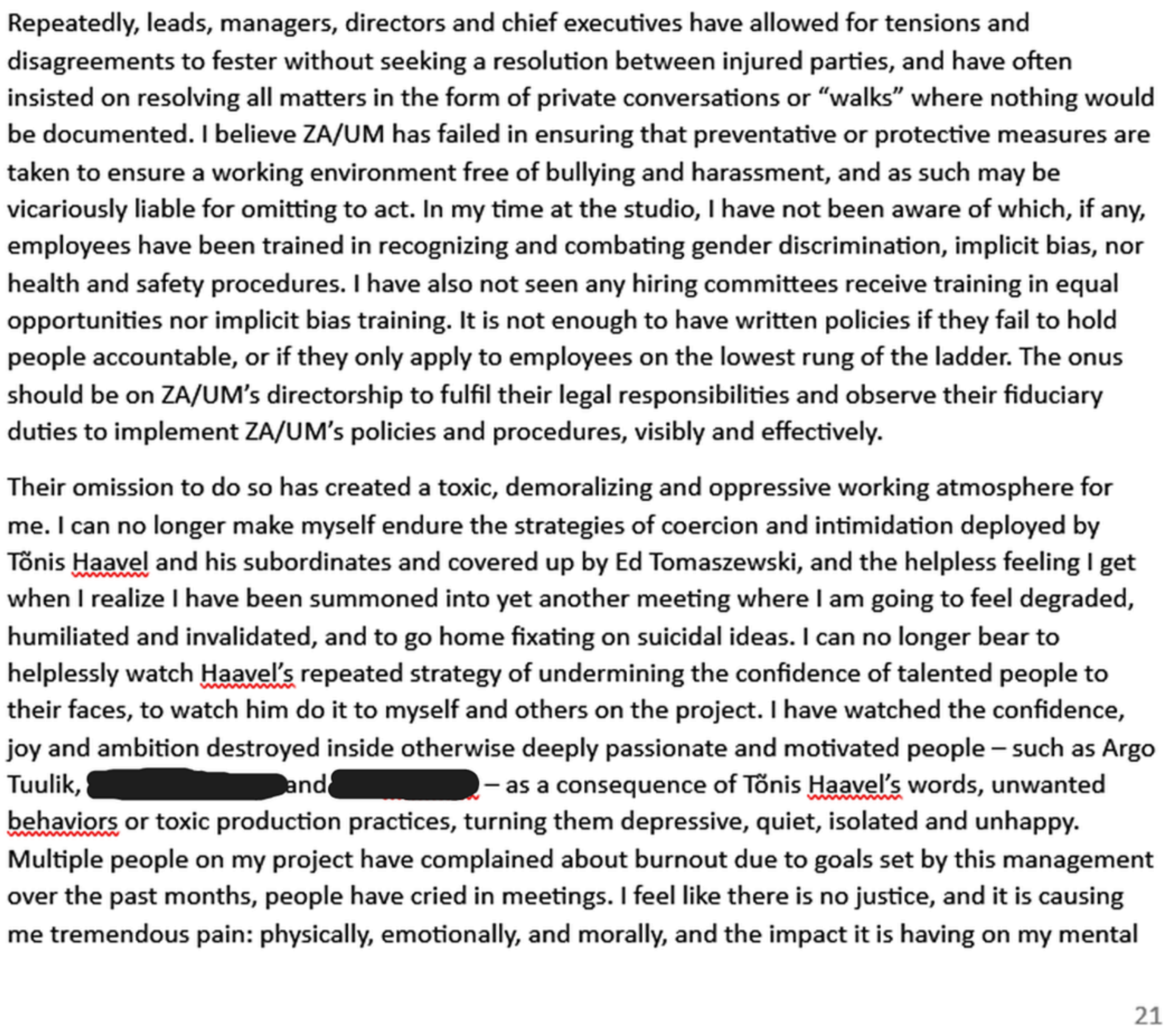
So don't let them get you down. You are a young, powerful, talented, incredibly intelligent and outspoken woman, and that is dangerous to people like the zaum management but FUCKING DYNAMITE for the rest of the world! 14:13



[redacted] 16:25

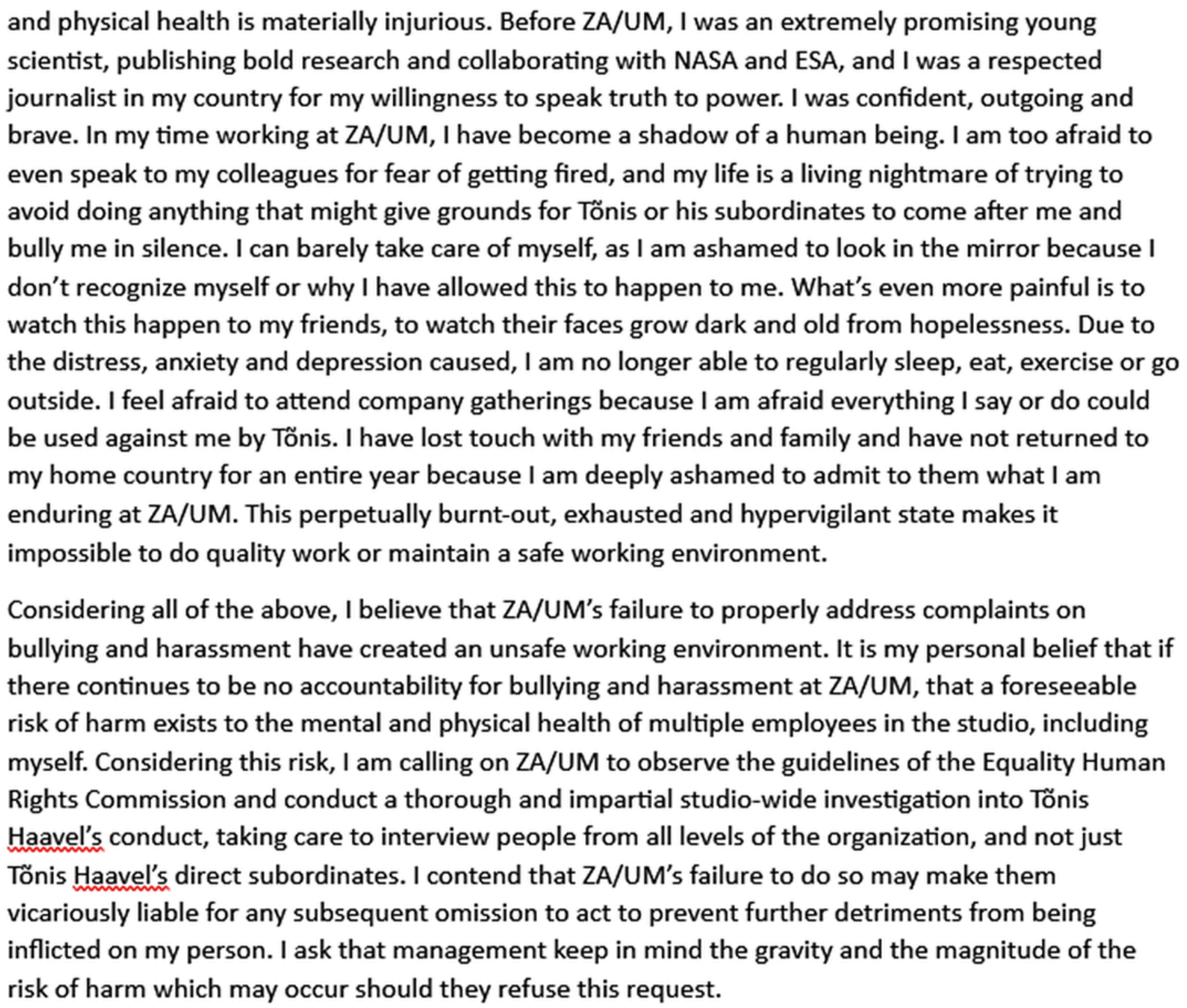
Im glad we have strong leads like Dora and Argo, who are standing their ground. Which is shame that they have to do that instead of being able to focus on the creative part.

If you're wondering whether ZA/UM was aware of the hardship that the entire team was going through due to crunch and demoralization, this is one excerpt from my Grievance, which they completely ignored and made everyone in question redundant:



Repeatedly, leads, managers, directors and chief executives have allowed for tensions and disagreements to fester without seeking a resolution between injured parties, and have often insisted on resolving all matters in the form of private conversations or “walks” where nothing would be documented. I believe ZA/UM has failed in ensuring that preventative or protective measures are taken to ensure a working environment free of bullying and harassment, and as such may be vicariously liable for omitting to act. In my time at the studio, I have not been aware of which, if any, employees have been trained in recognizing and combating gender discrimination, implicit bias, nor health and safety procedures. I have also not seen any hiring committees receive training in equal opportunities nor implicit bias training. It is not enough to have written policies if they fail to hold people accountable, or if they only apply to employees on the lowest rung of the ladder. The onus should be on ZA/UM’s directorship to fulfil their legal responsibilities and observe their fiduciary duties to implement ZA/UM’s policies and procedures, visibly and effectively.

Their omission to do so has created a toxic, demoralizing and oppressive working atmosphere for me. I can no longer make myself endure the strategies of coercion and intimidation deployed by Tõnis Haavel and his subordinates and covered up by Ed Tomaszewski, and the helpless feeling I get when I realize I have been summoned into yet another meeting where I am going to feel degraded, humiliated and invalidated, and to go home fixating on suicidal ideas. I can no longer bear to helplessly watch Haavel’s repeated strategy of undermining the confidence of talented people to their faces, to watch him do it to myself and others on the project. I have watched the confidence, joy and ambition destroyed inside otherwise deeply passionate and motivated people – such as Argo Tuulik, [redacted] and [redacted] – as a consequence of Tõnis Haavel’s words, unwanted behaviors or toxic production practices, turning them depressive, quiet, isolated and unhappy. Multiple people on my project have complained about burnout due to goals set by this management over the past months, people have cried in meetings. I feel like there is no justice, and it is causing me tremendous pain: physically, emotionally, and morally, and the impact it is having on my mental

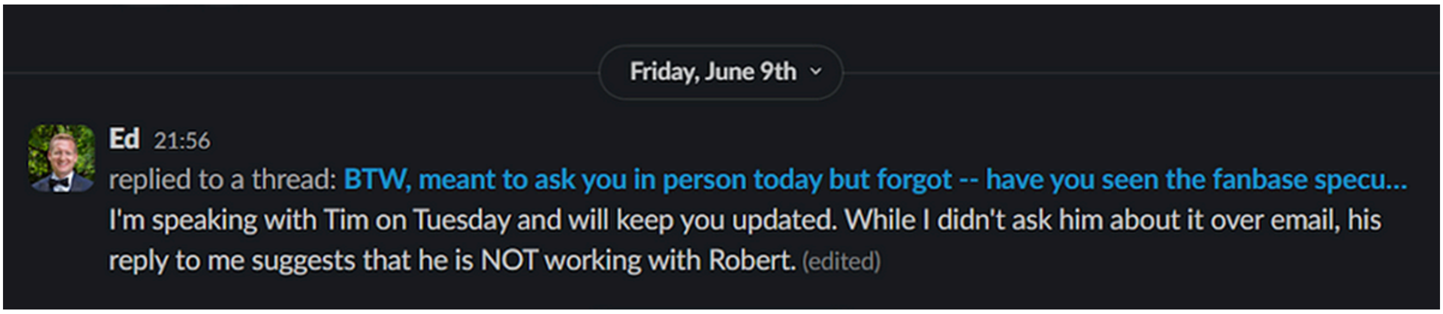


and physical health is materially injurious. Before ZA/UM, I was an extremely promising young scientist, publishing bold research and collaborating with NASA and ESA, and I was a respected journalist in my country for my willingness to speak truth to power. I was confident, outgoing and brave. In my time working at ZA/UM, I have become a shadow of a human being. I am too afraid to even speak to my colleagues for fear of getting fired, and my life is a living nightmare of trying to avoid doing anything that might give grounds for Tõnis or his subordinates to come after me and bully me in silence. I can barely take care of myself, as I am ashamed to look in the mirror because I don't recognize myself or why I have allowed this to happen to me. What's even more painful is to watch this happen to my friends, to watch their faces grow dark and old from hopelessness. Due to the distress, anxiety and depression caused, I am no longer able to regularly sleep, eat, exercise or go outside. I feel afraid to attend company gatherings because I am afraid everything I say or do could be used against me by Tõnis. I have lost touch with my friends and family and have not returned to my home country for an entire year because I am deeply ashamed to admit to them what I am enduring at ZA/UM. This perpetually burnt-out, exhausted and hypervigilant state makes it impossible to do quality work or maintain a safe working environment.

Considering all of the above, I believe that ZA/UM's failure to properly address complaints on bullying and harassment have created an unsafe working environment. It is my personal belief that if there continues to be no accountability for bullying and harassment at ZA/UM, that a foreseeable risk of harm exists to the mental and physical health of multiple employees in the studio, including myself. Considering this risk, I am calling on ZA/UM to observe the guidelines of the Equality Human Rights Commission and conduct a thorough and impartial studio-wide investigation into Tõnis Haavel's conduct, taking care to interview people from all levels of the organization, and not just Tõnis Haavel's direct subordinates. I contend that ZA/UM's failure to do so may make them vicariously liable for any subsequent omission to act to prevent further detriments from being inflicted on my person. I ask that management keep in mind the gravity and the magnitude of the risk of harm which may occur should they refuse this request.

Argo will also issue his own response in another Medium article, which you can read here. I'm not here to speak about or redeem his actions, but only mine, which were always carelessly bundled together with someone else's whenever ZA/UM hurled accusations, the same as in Helen's case. I simply do not think ZA/UM management perceive women as complete people—they certainly never perceived me, continuously degraded and diminished my professional competence for making complaints. They even forcibly reduced my role and left me out of critical review processes, even when I was more qualified *by measurable metrics* as a writer and game developer than others in the conversation, and even when the project suffered for lack of review. This entire saga is documented to the forensic degree, and what has been shared here barely scratches the surface. I don't expect it to change the opinion of those who are deep in the echo chamber of ZA/UM, but if there's one wish I have, then it's to be a cautionary tale to others who work in any professional field anywhere to know what exactly it means to try to stand up for yourself in an environment such as this.

If you've been sick of reading this—you cannot imagine how sick I am of writing this, and finding out new ways every few months in which ZA/UM have desperately tried to run professional interference against their former employees, because apparently they have such low confidence in the success of their own teams that they need to tirelessly work to undermine both ours and Red Info's professional connections. (Remember that time, Ed, you personally called Tim Cain to ask him not to work with Robert?)

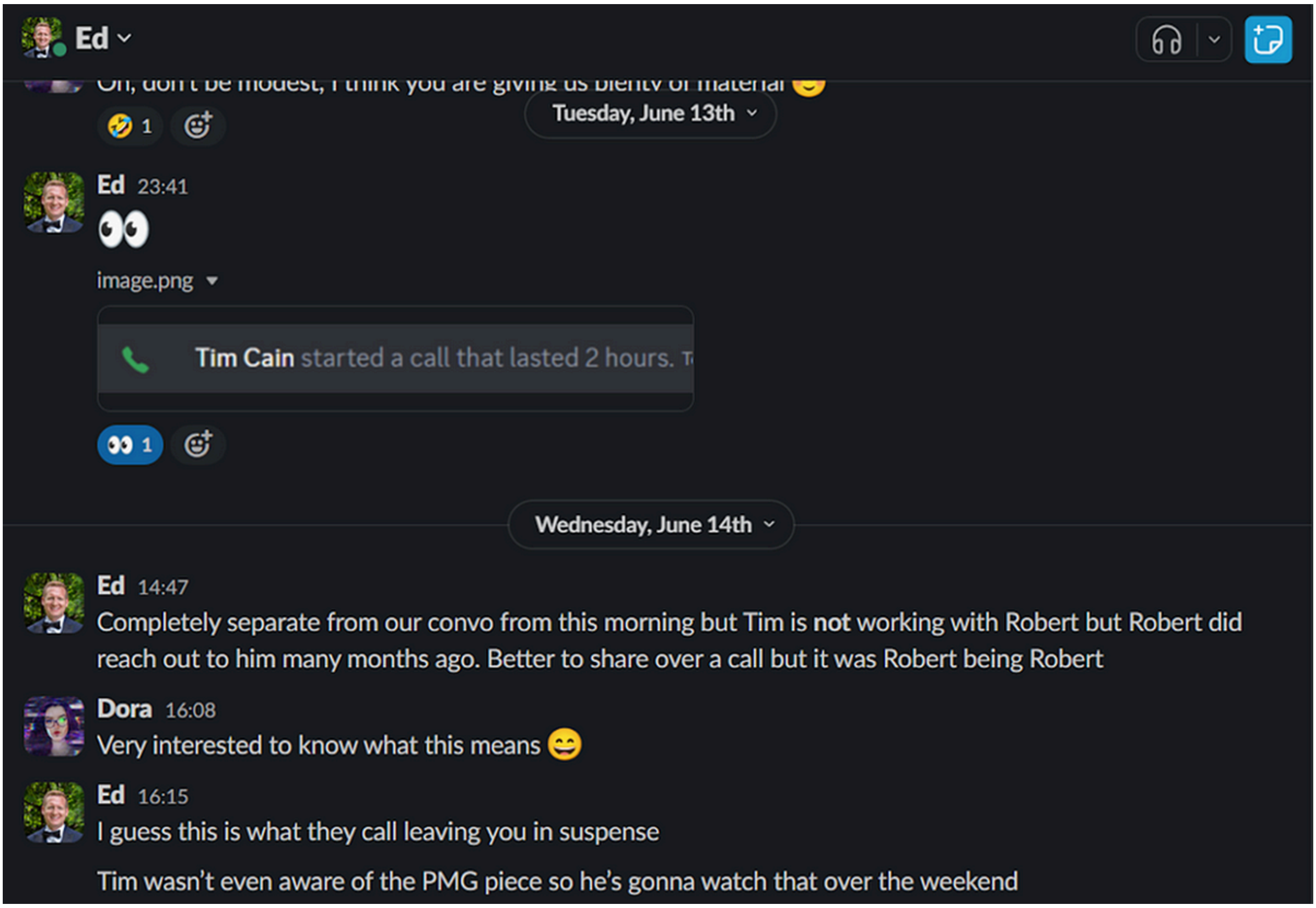


Friday, June 9th

Ed 21:56

replied to a thread: BTW, meant to ask you in person today but forgot -- have you seen the fanbase specu...

I'm speaking with Tim on Tuesday and will keep you updated. While I didn't ask him about it over email, his reply to me suggests that he is NOT working with Robert. (edited)



Oh, don't be modest, I think you are giving us plenty of material 😄

🤣 1

Tuesday, June 13th

Ed 23:41
👀

image.png

Tim Cain started a call that lasted 2 hours.

👀 1

Wednesday, June 14th

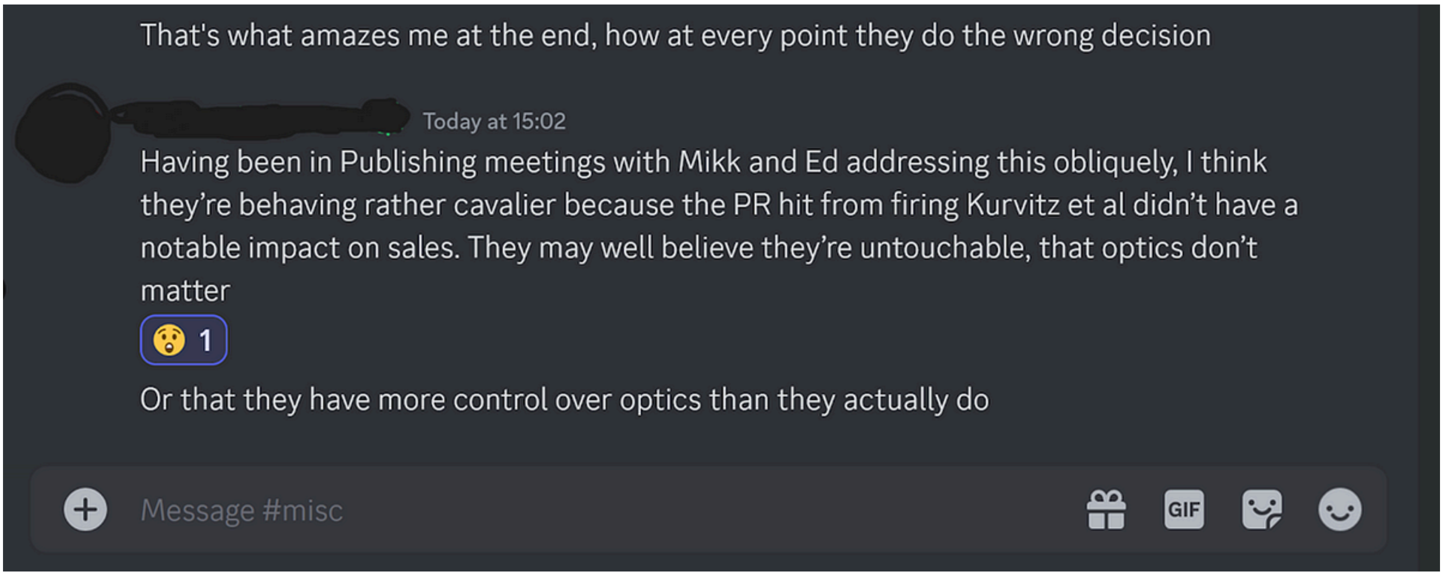
Ed 14:47
Completely separate from our convo from this morning but Tim is **not** working with Robert but Robert did reach out to him many months ago. Better to share over a call but it was Robert being Robert

Dora 16:08
Very interested to know what this means 😄

Ed 16:15
I guess this is what they call leaving you in suspense

Tim wasn't even aware of the PMG piece so he's gonna watch that over the weekend

Here's how much ZA/UM management cares what you think, by the way:



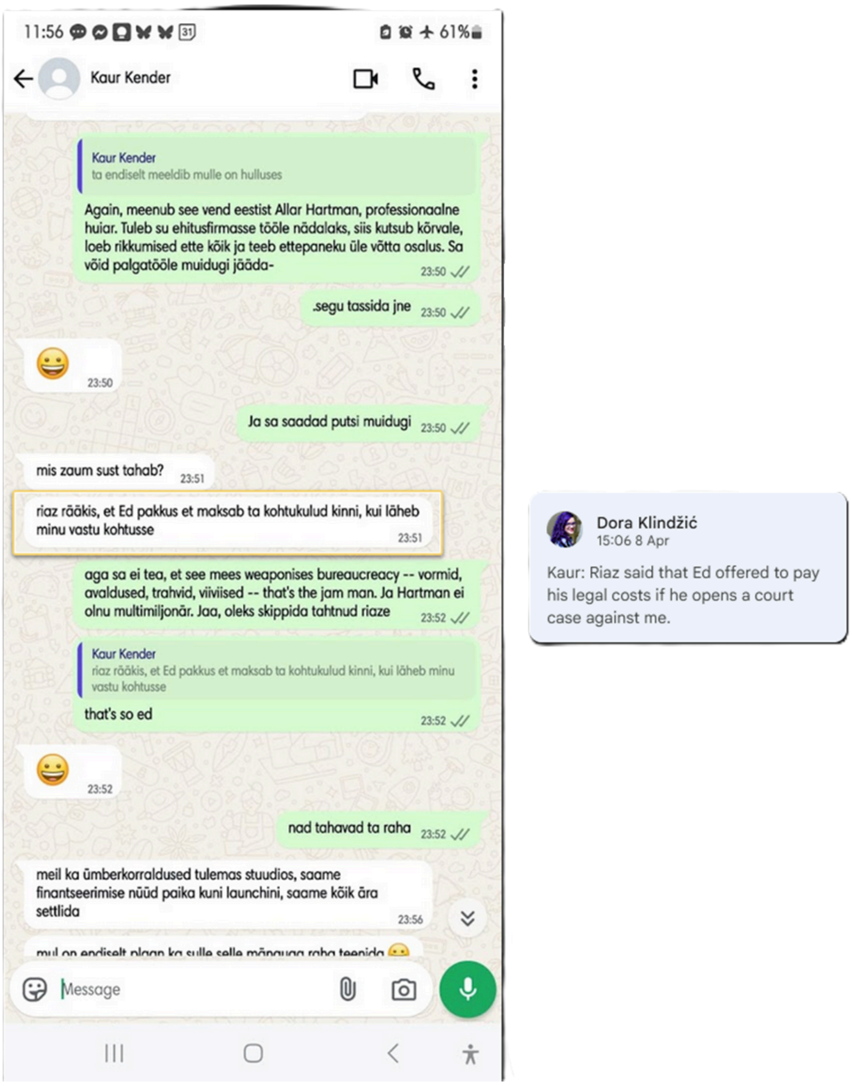
That's what amazes me at the end, how at every point they do the wrong decision

[redacted] Today at 15:02
Having been in Publishing meetings with Mikk and Ed addressing this obliquely, I think they're behaving rather cavalier because the PR hit from firing Kurvitz et al didn't have a notable impact on sales. They may well believe they're untouchable, that optics don't matter

😯 1

Or that they have more control over optics than they actually do

It's also unfortunate that due to legal risks for the good people at PMG a number of other evidence could not be shown on screen—such as a very telling message from Kaur Kender where he claims that ZA/UM's President Ed Tomaszewski, of "Kerbal Space Program 2 Takeover" fame, is offering to pay Riaz's legal costs if he goes into litigation against their former employees. There are also the extensive recordings and messages in my possession where Riaz himself brags about signing an NDA with ZA/UM management and talking with Ed, Ilmar and Tõnis to engage in information warfare about their former employees in exchange for ZA/UM letting him promote his own startup as *the* Disco Elysium successor. Maybe you guys should have known this guy is a liar and a leaky sieve before you started scheming with him? That's okay that he fooled you though, I guess we have one thing in common.



> Kaur Kender
> ta endiselt meeldib mulle on hulluses

Again, meenub see vend eestist Allar Hartman, professionaalne huiar. Tuleb su ehitusfirmasse tööle nädalaks, siis kutsub kõrvale, loeb rikkumised ette kõik ja teeb ettepaneku üle võtta osalus. Sa võid palgatööle muidugi jääda- 23:50

.segu tassida jne 23:50

😀 23:50

Ja sa saadad putsi muidugi 23:50

mis zaum sust tahab? 23:51

riaz rääkis, et Ed pakkus et maksab ta kohtukulud kinni, kui läheb minu vastu kohtusse 23:51

aga sa ei tea, et see mees weaponises bureaucreacy -- vormid, avaldused, trahvid, viiviised -- that's the jam man. Ja Hartman ei olnu multimiljonär. Jaa, oleks skippida tahtnud riaze 23:52

> Kaur Kender
> riaz rääkis, et Ed pakkus et maksab ta kohtukulud kinni, kui läheb minu vastu kohtusse

that's so ed 23:52

😀 23:52

nad tahavad ta raha 23:52

meil ka ümberkorraldused tulemas stuudios, saame finantseerimise nüüd paika kuni launchini, saame kõik ära settlida 23:56

mul on endiselt plaan ka sulle selle mänguga raha teenida

Dora Klindžić
15:06 8 Apr

Kaur: Riaz said that Ed offered to pay his legal costs if he opens a court case against me.

15th November 2024, Kaur claims Riaz said Ed will pay his legal costs for suing their competitors

On a final note, a private company which is >70% majority owned by one single person, who is also acting as CEO and who came into power under disputed circumstances, who rejected with a laugh his workers' proposal to convert the company to a co-operative, now claiming to **"empower teams, not individuals"** and preaching that **"success is shared, not vested in one person"**, is absolutely hilarious hypocrisy and possibly the first genuine line of comedy I've seen ZA/UM put out in five years. Ilmar, now that you've forced out every single writer who ever wrote on Disco Elysium and Locust City, perhaps you should pick up the pen yourself?